

AW

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THE MOVIE

Plus: Holiday Specials, Creating a VFX Studio
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Upping *The Experience*: The Skinny on IMAX



TO CALL IMAX'S STATE OF THE ART 70MM PROJECTION SYSTEM THE IMAX 'Experience' sounds a bit presumptuous, but when it comes down to it, the facts don't lie. These days a trip to the local multiplex leaves me disoriented and puzzled. Having to negotiate an assaultive lobby lightshow and a food court worthy of any mall, I'm often left wondering whether I came for a slice of pizza and a latte

or for a movie. With IMAX, there's no mistaking the intent of the 'Experience.' With screens up to 80 feet tall, uncompressed multi-speaker surround sound, and state of the art projection systems providing a more stable image, the IMAX presentation leaves you more with the impression of being 'in' the movies than 'at' the movies. →



IT WAS THE OVERWHELMING SUCCESS OF DISNEY'S *FANTASIA/2000* IN IMAX THEATRES THAT SHOWED THAT COMMERCIAL ANIMATION COULD NOT ONLY BE POPULAR, BUT EXTREMELY PROFITABLE...

Fantasia/2000 was IMAX's first big animated hit.
© Disney Enterprises, Inc.

Education Only

These IMAX systems are impressive, but the question has always remained: why isn't there, alongside the immersive image and sound, a story you can really get into? Since their introduction in 1970, IMAX cinemas have primarily screened educational, fact-based documentaries of the science and nature variety. This is partly due to audience interest, as most of the early IMAX screens were located in museums and planetariums. But the choice of subject matter for IMAX productions had mostly been dependent on cost. The whole process, from shooting to screening, is cumbersome and just plain too expensive for narrative features. With so few screens to recoup expenses (225 in 30 countries) production costs must be kept down. While IMAX has had success with non-fiction films, what has given the 35mm format the upper hand is its narrative content. In an attempt to keep up with the Hollywood film industry, IMAX gradually introduced animated films into their programming — a far cheaper alternative to costly live-action films.

While bits of animation had been featured in past IMAX films, it was the overwhelming success of Disney's *Fantasia/2000* in IMAX theatres that showed that commercial animation could not only be popular, but extremely profitable on the (really) large screen. Opening in January 2000, the film made \$50 million on a mere 75 screens in Canada and the U.S. and grossed \$89.4 million worldwide. This success prompted deals with Vancouver's **Mainframe Entertainment** (to produce original CG films), PDI/Dreamworks (to re-release *Shrek* in 3D) and Disney (to re-release *Beauty and the Beast*). However, any potential growth was nipped in the bud; as the IMAX corporation struggled with layoffs and closures due to theatre chain bankruptcies (too many screens and too few crowds), decreased stock values and estimated losses for the near future. The Mainframe projects were postponed. The *Shrek* project was cancelled. IMAX's 'Commercial Theatre Strategy' was put temporarily on hold.

LONG BEFORE DMR WAS RELEASED, THE IMAX/DISNEY TEAM WERE RE-PURPOSING FILMS USING THEIR OWN DIGITAL PRODUCTION SYSTEM.



The Walt Disney Company has been the first and most high-profile adopter of IMAX's special form of distribution with hits like *The Lion King* being re-released and new films like *Treasure Planet* being released on IMAX and 35mm screens simultaneously. © Disney Enterprise, Inc. All rights reserved.

THE OTHER SIDE

In a last-ditch effort to attract audiences, the company decided in the spring of 2001 to increase revenue by canceling IMAX screenings and replacing them with current blockbusters like *Tomb Raider* and *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*. While the movies did not play in the full 70mm format, the enhanced sound and 'event-ness' of the experience attracted larger crowds than regular IMAX films. But the biggest push of all came in mid-2002 when the company announced the release of their newest technology, IMAX DMR. **DMR** (short for 'digital re-mastering') allows for 35mm live-action films to be inexpensively transferred to 15/70 (15 perforation, 70mm) format. The proprietary technology mathematically analyzes and extracts important elements of each frame, eliminating the film grain (image graininess becomes apparent when blowing up a frame to twice its size) to render sharper images than in the original. The soundtrack is also extracted and

enhanced in a similar manner. IMAX DMR premiered with the re-release of Ron Howard's *Apollo 13* in September 2002. Having overcome the biggest obstacle in releasing popular Hollywood films (i.e., the cost), the company was still testing out the waters with content that straddles the line between education and entertainment. "For around five years, IMAX has been trying to marry the best of what Hollywood has to offer with IMAX quality images and sound," says Bradley J. Wechsler, co-chairman and co-chief executive officer of IMAX Corporation. "With *Apollo 13*, we accomplish that goal. It's visually stunning, historically relevant and accurate, and emotionally inspirational. In short, it's the type of film that will not only play beautifully in the best IMAX commercial theatres around the world, it will also play in the best museums and science centers where a number of our theatres are as well."

Confident after the success of *Apollo 13*, the company ventured into fare that was less "historically relevant and accurate" and more frivolous. *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones – The IMAX Experience* had its first showing at select IMAX theatres at midnight on Hallowe'en 2002. Not only an historical event for many Star Wars fans, who spent weeks preparing what they called "the biggest party of the year, for the biggest movie of the year, on the biggest screens," but also in terms of profitability. The film made \$1.4 million on 58 screens in North America the first weekend, the highest per-screen average for the weekend and one of the biggest openings ever for an exclusive IMAX release. It also has the distinction of being the first digitally captured and created film to be converted to 70mm. IMAX's commitment to bringing entertaining films that would best suit the large screen and the success of *Star Wars Episode II* bodes well for future digitally created and vfx heavy films, especially considering that this release was the extended run of the movie's initial May 2002 release.

A REVENUE BREAKTHROUGH

Representatives at the IMAX Corporation state that the strong openings of its first two DMR releases and the increased level of signing activity show that momentum is building throughout the business. The anticipated losses for 2001 were smaller than originally predicted and the corporation is expecting a profit for this year. Subsequent to the end of the quarter, IMAX Corporation signed an agreement with Regal Entertainment Group, the largest motion picture exhibitor in the world, to

install IMAX systems in 5 new cinemas. Regal's decision to double the size of its network of large screens comes on the heels of the introduction of IMAX DMR. "The Regal announcement hastens the growth of the Company, delivers tangible earnings to the Company in 2003 and, by all measures, is an important milestone in the pursuit of our goal of becoming a new release window for Hollywood films," said IMAX co-CEO Richard L. Gelfond. "These strong results demonstrate that IMAX theatres are a new way for Hollywood to earn incremental returns...We continue to have discussions with virtually all of the Hollywood studios about bringing our first live-action day-and-date release to IMAX theatres in 2003."

Indeed, since the release of the DMR technology, IMAX has joined in partnership with CAA (Creative Artists Agency) to secure live-action entertainment films for simultaneous release. The company may currently be focusing its efforts on live-action blockbusters, but it has

ANIMATED FILMS ARE ALSO LEADING THE WAY IN THE AREA OF EXCLUSIVE RELEASES.

not forgotten its past success with animated films. While animation is riding on the coattails of DMR's success, it is still breaking records and box offices alike. Long before DMR was released, the IMAX/Disney team were re-purposing films using their own digital production system. Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* was the very first narrative feature to be released in large format. Instead of blowing the film up to 70mm format, each frame of the digital film was re-rendered at a higher resolution. After the huge success of *Beauty and the Beast* and with IMAX's recent advancements, plans were made to re-release a slew of Disney hits: the most recent being the *The Lion King*, which will be hitting IMAX screens this Christmas. Unlike *Beauty and the Beast*, which was re-released with a brand new musical number, *The Lion King The IMAX Experience* will not contain new footage. Several scenes, however, have been tweaked or enhanced to better suit the large screen. In the next three years Disney also plans to release *Aladdin*, *Tarzan* and *The Little Mermaid* in IMAX. And while live-action day-and-date releases are still in the planning stages, Disney's *Treasure Planet* has already become the first major studio feature to be released simultaneously in 35mm venues as well as IMAX theatres. Directed by John Musker and Ron Clements (the team

behind such hits as *The Little Mermaid* and *Aladdin*), the film should be an eleven year-old boy's dream: combining the science-fiction world of robots and outer space with the swashbuckling fantasy adventures of Robert Louis Stevenson's novel *Treasure Island*. Unfortunately, the film fell into the trap of too much technique and not enough substance (or fun). As a result, it will also go down in the history books as the studio's first clear money-loser.

ORIGINAL FARE!

Animated films are also leading the way in the area of exclusive releases. *Santa vs. the Snowman 3D*, released November 2002 worldwide, is the first 3D animated holiday film made specifically for IMAX screens. IMAX had previously ventured into 3D (yes, you wear the 3D glasses) computer animation with *Cyberworld*, released in October 2000. While this film was successful, grossing \$1.9 million in 3 weeks on 30 screens, it was not quite groundbreaking in the area of narrative storytelling. Featuring excerpts from PDI's *Antz*, the famous "Homer3D" segment from *The Simpsons* and other CG short films, all loosely linked with a cheesy story, the intent more than anything was to wow the audience with cool virtual worlds and the latest computer techniques. *Fantasia/2000* was far less gimmicky, but still intended to impress with stunning sound and image rather than a fantastic story. Aware of the narrative shortcomings in many recent CG and IMAX films, the creators of *Santa vs. the Snowman 3D* set out to make a film that would amaze the eye, but also tell a good holiday story with a contemporary twist. Created by Steve Oedekerke and directed by John A. Davis (the Academy Award nominated team behind *Jimmy Neutron*), the film uses the unique properties of 3D and digital computer animation, along with the scale of the IMAX screen, to enhance the story. Oedekerke believes that the combination of the latest advances in animation and IMAX technology is a positive and momentous step in the future of storytelling. "*Santa vs. the Snowman 3D* captures the true holiday spirit, but with a comedic twist that I feel will keep adults as well as children entertained for years to come. Seeing the images in staggering size on the gigantic IMAX screen, in true 3D animation, brings narrative storytelling into a new dimension. The audience lives inside the film. It's really exciting, like watching what movies may be 50 years from now, a first step in redefining the experience of movie-going." To date, the film has grossed nearly \$1.1 million on 25 screens.



Santa vs. the Snowman 3D is one of the first narrative animated stories completed especially for IMAX's new source of distribution. © 2002 O Entertainment. All rights reserved. IMAX® IS A REGISTERED. TRADEMARK OF IMAX CORPORATION.

IMAX screens have seen a series of firsts this year, and, interestingly enough, most of these 'firsts' have a lot to do with animation. While DMR is on everyone's mind right now, what does the future hold for animated films at IMAX? When asked if there were any plans to develop tools to aid in the production of animated features, an IMAX spokesperson said, "IMAX is always looking for ways to further develop our technologies and to deliver the highest quality, family friendly entertainment," but could not comment on anything specific in the research and development stage. At this time the company's 'ultimate goal' may be live-action day and date releases, but they are keenly aware that animation is a great asset in drawing audiences of all ages and will continue to support those interested in pushing the boundaries of the cinematic experience and narrative storytelling.

In short, what was once billed as the 'ultimate field trip' is soon to become the 'ultimate movie-going experience.' ■

TINA PAAS is the assistant director and programmer for the Ottawa International Animation Festival and the associate editor of ASIFA International Magazine.



Story, animation and technology come together for Steve Oedekerk in *Santa vs. the Snowman*. All *Santa vs. the Snowman* images © 2002 O Entertainment. All rights reserved. IMAX® is a registered trademark of IMAX Corporation.

WAS ALWAYS ADDICTED TO MOVIES. AS EARLY AS I can remember it was my favorite form of escape and adventure. At that time in my life I never differentiated between live-action or animation, I simply flocked to the films that made me laugh or swept me away to another time and place.

THE IMAX EXPERIENCE

Years later, about the age of 17, I went to my first giant screen film. I remember sitting in this bigger than life IMAX theater. A booming voice came up before the movie started and sort of bragged about the size of the screen and the number of speakers, which made me laugh as I had never witnessed a film proceeded by such pomposity. But when the picture rolled, my jaw dropped and I was truly awestruck. It had finally happened. I was in the film. As the camera soared down a stream of rapids, the theater seemed to be moving right along that path. I was along for the ride.

A New Dimension in Animation IMAX 3D

THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF THE 3D ELEMENT, ALTHOUGH NOT A COMPLICATED PROCESS, OPEN UP ALL KINDS OF NEW DECISION MAKING.

by Steve Oedekerk



A cinephile in the making: Oedekerk as a young boy fell in love with all kinds of movies. Photo courtesy of Steve Oedekerk.

I frequently returned, enjoying the various documentaries that put me on a race track, in the Grand Canyon or viewing the earth from Space. I fully enjoyed the experience, but started wondering, "Why aren't there story-based movies being shown in these amazing theaters?" A seed was planted that now, years later has grown into *Santa vs. the Snowman* IMAX 3D, an expression of my passion for story, animation and new technologies. Film, animation, the giant screen and 3D all joined together for the sole purpose of family entertainment.

This new palette for narrative storytelling has exceeded my expectations and I am finding myself passionately committed to this rather challenging format. With the combination of true 3D and the large format IMAX screen, you get a sense that you can reach right into the picture.

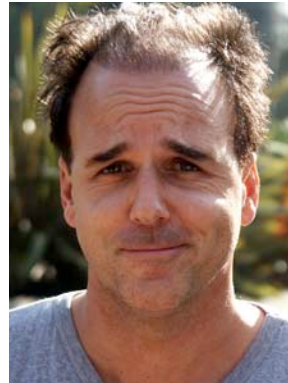
GET YOUR GLASSES!

3D has long been utilized and viewed as a simple gimmick. Most of the 3D films of years past were using the experience as an opportunity to throw objects at



The combination of 3D and IMAX pulls the viewer into the movie.

3D HAS LONG BEEN UTILIZED AND VIEWED AS A SIMPLE GIMMICK.



Oedekerke firmly believes the next technological advancement will be viewing 3D without glasses. Photo courtesy of Steve Oedekerke.

the audience or as the infamous SCTV sketch so wonderfully displayed, sort of move objects outside the screen in not so subtle or organic ways. In reality, 3D is an unbelievably powerful asset in a story-based theatrical experience. It truly is the next level.

When sound was first introduced to feature filmmaking many thought it was a gimmick and a fad that would go away. Ultimately, it became a great stride forward in enhancing the film experience. When color was introduced many complained that it too would pass as color would certainly jeopardize the integrity and artistic nature of film and filmmaking. This kind of thinking would have

screen? What placement best services the emotion of the moment? It's a whole new world and Santa vs. the Snowman has only scratched the surface of the possibilities.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The process of producing an animated film for the giant screen in true 3D is no small task. From a directorial perspective, the entire screen composition is neither similar to that of television or feature films. In short, imagine having to leave an enormous border around the top and sides of your intended shot. This is critical space, as without it you will be producing only a gigantic image, rather than immersing the audience into the action.

The issues that rise from this framing are as interesting as they are challenging. Suddenly, what feels like a medium shot to the audience is actually a head-to-toe shot of that same character, with a third of the upper screen wide open space and on top of that you now have two characters that have to be included in the shot (and animated) that would normally not be there.

Current films that are being "blown up" to large format, definitely carry a bigger image, but audiences will often have to tilt their heads upward to view the action and may be a bit overwhelmed by a 60 foot face provided by a normally standard close-up, not to mention the slight but visible letterboxing that accompanies most of these films. These elements are a foregone conclusion if a film is not produced

THE PROCESS OF PRODUCING AN ANIMATED FILM FOR THE GIANT SCREEN IN TRUE 3D IS NO SMALL TASK.

ultimately diluted the impact of such eye-popping masterpieces as *The Wizard of Oz* and *Snow White* and the *Seven Dwarfs*.

I am totally certain the day that 3D can be filmed and projected without special glasses and screened on standard movie theater screens, there will be no turning back to 2D. 3D brings a new dimension to storytelling that has the power to enhance not only the cinematographer's visual work and style, but also the director's vision. Imagine a new plane of decision making in your shot selections. Do you want your character or object of focus to be ten feet behind the screen? Right at the screen? Twenty feet outside the

STORY WAS KING, STORY IS KING AND STORY WILL BE KING.



No matter what the technological advancement, story will always be king. Everything else is just embellishment.

and framed specifically for the giant screen.

The technical aspects of the 3D element, although not a complicated process, open up all kinds of new decision making. The Z axis comes into formidable play. A simple element of falling snow becomes a more powerful addition to a scene if the snow is falling all around the audience rather than on a

screen thirty feet in front of them.

The film is essentially rendered with two "eyes," similar to how we see in real life. As our eyes converge on the object we want to view in perfect focus, the filmmaker chooses the point of this convergence.

Regarding the past, present and future of feature animation, the rule book is pretty simple. Story was king, story is king and story will be king. But like sound and color, 3D used as an enhancement to storytelling, rather than a one note gag, is an exciting new frontier that has just begun to be explored. ■

STEVE OEDEKERK, creator and executive producer of *Santa vs. The Snowman 3D*, has established a multi-faceted career in animation, live-action and stage work that includes producing, directing, writing, acting and stand-up comedy. Oedeker's animation projects include co-writing the Academy Award® nominated feature *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius* and executive producing the Nickelodeon series *The Adventures of Jimmy Neutron*. In the live-action world, Oedeker continues his long relationship with Jim Carrey in the upcoming *Bruce Almighty*. Their previous collaborations include *In Living Color*, *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* and its sequel, *When Nature Calls*.

Online Highlights

Every online (HTML) issue of *Animation World Magazine* contains additional features not found in the download or print Acrobat version, such as QuickTime movies. Don't miss the following highlights that are showcased exclusively in this month's *Animation World Magazine* HTML version:

THE CONTROVERSIAL ICEBERGCLUB

When Jean Pascal Princiaux's film, [*Icebergclub*](#), screened at the 2002 International Animated Film Festival at Annecy, the crowd went wild. Find out why in this interview with the filmmaker by Annick Tenenge.

HASH ALLOWS BEGINNING 3D ANIMATORS TO LOOK LIKE PROS

View clips of the CGI films created with Animation:Master, [*Alien Song*](#) by Victor Navone, Jeffrey Lew's [*Killer Bean 2*](#), [*Snapshots*](#) by Conrad Chow.

ITALY'S I CASTELLI REVIEWED

Cathal Gaffney's [*Give Up Yer Aul Sins*](#) and [*In Between*](#) by Nicole Hewitt were shown at I Castelli Animati 2002, check 'em out at awn.com.

View the QuickTime clips online!



AFRICAN ADVENTURE

The Wild Thornberrys Movie: by Gregory Singer

A Perfect Balancing Act

THE WILD THORNBERRYS MOVIE DEFTLY JUGGLES ITS HOPEFUL AMBITION FOR COMMERCIAL SUCCESS WITH ITS HOPEFUL MESSAGE OF ECOLOGICAL STEWARDSHIP.

HAPPENED TO BE SITTING NEXT TO ONE of Klasky-Csupo's character animation layout artists during the world premiere of *The Wild Thornberrys Movie*. Before the show started, in casual conversation, he asked me, "Do you think the movie will do well at the box office?"

"I certainly hope so," I answered as the lights went down and I settled in to see the latest TV show to big screen transformation.

A GOOD TIME

Well, the verdict is in and — *The Wild Thornberrys Movie* is good, solid family entertainment. If you read no further than these first few introductory paragraphs, you will be happy to know that your hard-won dollars and afternoon hours will not be squandered in patronizing the film.

The premise for the Thornberrys' adventures is simple enough. Nigel and Marianne Thornberry (voiced by Tim Curry and Jodi Carlisle, respectively) are documentary filmmakers who travel around the world with their family, recording the miraculous splendor of the natural world. Along for the ride are rebellious teenager Debbie (Danielle Harris), adopted wild child Donnie (Michael Balzary), and precocious protagonist Eliza (Lacey Chabert), who has the ability to talk with animals. The crew is rounded out by Eliza's chimpanzee friend Darwin, voiced by Tom Kane, whose versatile work ranges from playing Yoda in the *Star Wars* video games to the professor in the *The Powerpuff Girls* television series, her

Plucky Eliza saves the day — not with her special powers but with her heart. All images courtesy of Paramount/Nickelodeon.

IT IS A JAUNTY, WELL-INTENTIONED 80 MINUTES OF ANIMATED ADVENTURE, AND ONE THAT BOTH CHILDREN AND ADULTS CAN APPRECIATE.

The Thornberrys gang!



aristocratic Grandmumsy Cordelia Thornberry (Lynn Redgrave), and her free-spirited Grandpapa, Colonel Thornberry (also played by Tim Curry). Also lending her talents to the film is Academy Award winner Marisa Tomei, as the new character Bree Blackburn. Each of the characters uniquely contributes to the chemistry of the show, and, in its outwardly effortless calculation to entertain the whole family, *The Wild Thornberrys Movie* certainly has some personality with whom everyone can identify.

Now, I am not much inclined to delve into the specifics of the story, nor to recapitulate its plot. It's not that anything wildly unexpected happens, but in my mind, it somewhat deflates the experience of seeing the movie for yourself. (No doubt, there are plenty of online reviews to satisfy your curiosity of the film's details, if you absolutely cannot withhold your discovery.) Suffice to say, Eliza Thornberry uses her gift of being able to communicate with animals to help protect the natural beauty and ecology of, in this case, Africa.

But, it's not quite Eliza's "gift" that is so important here, as much as it is her raw, genuine ability to care.

What can one freckle-faced 12-year-old with pigtails and braces do against all the greed, ignorance and hatred in the world? This is the real rumination of the movie. Through Eliza and her family, we are reminded that while caring may appear uncool, it has profoundly radical benefits. In one affectionate scene, Eliza's normally sarcastic teenage sister confides, "You just care. You've never been ordinary." Through doubt and difficulty, there lies an expansive opportunity for compassion and courage. The essential, beating heart of the story is that we don't need extraordinary powers to do extraordinary things. Kate Boutilier, writer of *The Wild Thornberrys Movie*, remarked, "If one young person walks out of the theater feeling a greater sense of his or her own place in the world and a responsibility to the creatures on this earth, I will feel the movie has succeeded."

ADVENTURE WITH AN AGENDA

The Wild Thornberrys television series which inspired the movie is well regarded for its meticulous attention in presenting the world's natural and cultural diversity. Producer Arlene Klasky comments,



Darwin is with Eliza through thick and thin, from late night conversations regarding her fate to an all girls school in England.

"We decided that if we're going to take young people to all these marvelous places and expose them to such a wide variety of nature, we'd better portray every indigenous plant, every animal and all the natives as accurately as possible." In addition to its commitment to excellence, the television show is also known for introducing into episodes such prominent figures as renowned chimpanzee expert Jane Goodall, among others. Ark Trust, a nonprofit animal protection organization, has honored *The Wild Thornberrys* show with two Genesis Awards, given to members of the news and entertainment media for positive portrayals of animal issues. For *The Wild Thornberrys Movie*, a percentage of the premiere's proceeds has been donated to the World Wildlife Fund, which is the world's largest conservation organization, operating in more than 100 countries.

Actor Obba Babbatundé, who portrays the

friendly tribesman Boko in the movie, notes, "Having been a consultant in African folklore to schools in New York, I consider it a distinct pleasure to be able to lend my expertise, knowledge and experience to a project as worthwhile as this film." Babbatundé adds, "Also, as an animal rights activist, it is an honor to be taking part in a movie that highlights the plight of endangered species."

Michael Balzary, alias Flea, the bass player from the Red Hot Chili Peppers, voices the Thornberrys' adopted wild child Donnie in the series and the movie. As an inspiration for his own daughter, Balzary has been proud to be involved with the project's ongoing theme of preserving wildlife and respecting nature.

The music in the movie is also noteworthy, with contributions from the likes of Paul Simon, Peter Dinklage, P. Diddy and Brandy, The Pretenders, and Youssou N'Dour (you may remember his music from *Kirikou and the Sorceress*). Music supervisor George Acogny was attracted to *The Wild Thornberrys Movie*, like others, because of the film's ecological, animal rights and anti-poacher perspective. As a native from Senegal, Acogny brought his unique sensibility to the project in blending African chants and percussion with nontraditional orchestral work.

FUN FOR A PURPOSE

However, the film isn't a "save the animals of the world" preachfest. In all, *The Wild Thornberrys Movie* is a jaunty, well-intentioned 80 minutes of animated adventure, and one that both children and adults can appreciate. Naturally, it bears the distinctive, stylized aesthetic of Klasky-Csupo, as we have seen pioneered in previous productions of *The Simpsons*, *Duckman* and, of course, *The Rugrats* (the movie of which, in 1998, was the first non-Disney animated feature to breach \$100 million at the domestic box office).

Some persons would contend that any art which tries to communicate ethical ideas is merely propaganda. Nonetheless, we live during one of those curiously reflective, self-conscious times in history, when already we can imagine future generations, our own grandkids, asking of us, "As the biological heritage of the earth passes into extinction, how is it that we have chosen not to care?"

Here again, *The Wild Thornberrys Movie* deftly

juggles its hopeful ambition for commercial success (a tip of the hat to the marketplace) with its hopeful message of ecological stewardship (a tip of the hat to the human race). It is a clever balance. Will it do well at the box office? I certainly hope so. In the end, critical and commercial success for any animated film, of any aesthetic or genre, implies success for the animation community as a whole. ■

Darwin and Eliza rescue a rhino that has had a close brush with poachers.



This isn't how most people's grandparents drop in for a visit!

Once upon a time, **GREG SINGER** served as an agroforestry extension officer in the Peace Corps in Kenya. He now lives in Los Angeles, helping with animation production and game development.

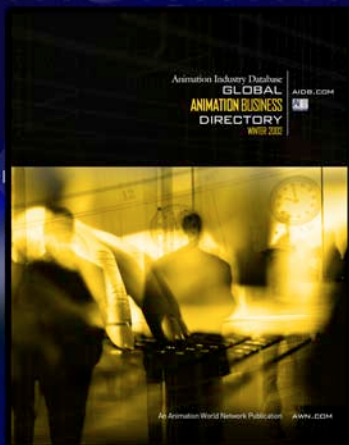
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ALIEN ALOHA

Lilo & Stitch

Revisited: Part I

by Andrew Osmond



Chris Sanders (right) and Dean DeBlois, co-writers and co-directors of *Lilo & Stitch*. All *Lilo & Stitch* images © Disney Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved.

HERE'S SOMETHING RATHER UNNERVING ABOUT SEEING a man speaking fluent Stitch. From Chris Sanders' larynx emerges the familiar cackling, howling gibber that we've learned to associate with the blue-skinned, pint-sized genetic whatsit called experiment 626, puppy impersonator and maker of mayhem. Thankfully Mr. Sanders is more articulate in English, as he talks to AWN about his film, together with co-director and co-writer Dean DeBlois.

Throughout this interview (conducted in London's Dorchester hotel), Sanders was flipping through a wildlife magazine in search of future fauna inspiration. Trivia freaks may like to know that sea-otters have an archetypal "Chris Sanders head": low eyes



Sanders and DeBlois meet up with the Flying Elvises at a *Lilo & Stitch* publicity event.

and a nose that's big and high on the face. Hey, have we found Lilo's next pet?

Andrew Osmond: You've stressed that *Lilo & Stitch* was a very 'intimate' kind of Disney film. Can you talk more about the pros and cons of that?

Chris Sanders: It was a very pragmatic decision. We had just finished working on *Mulan*, which was a very big production, not only in terms of the number of people but also the scale of the story. We wanted to bring all that down in size and tell a more intimate story, just to keep ourselves fresh. And we realized through the experience of *Mulan* that the more people who are involved in the writing and directing of a film...well, it's not going to make it a better or worse film but it will slow the process. Anybody who has ordered a pizza with more than two other people knows the amount of discussion will increase dramatically. We wanted to get this film done quickly. We paid for our story freedom by promising to bring it in on a very low budget, very fast, and we knew we needed fewer people at the front-end to accomplish that.

So we wrote, directed and storyboarded it and this gave us clarity and speed. It also required that we be much more critical of what we're doing, because one of the things we lost by reducing the crew is the number of people that could question and contribute. We were a little bit concerned that we might get something up on screen that was way too personal to appeal to a mass audience. We needed to be very critical of our own and each others' work.

AO: Film pundits often say 'big' films involving lots of decision-makers become impersonal, lacking

real vision. You've talked about speed and budget, but how did *Lilo's* intimacy affect its quality?

Dean DeBlois: There's a compromise when you involve lots of people, because ultimately 30 people can only agree on something that falls in the realm of cliché. What happened with this film is that the studio understood it was going to be something unusual and quirky and unique for Disney storytelling. Having seen us work together previously on

Mulan and having a certain amount of trust in us, they gave us the latitude and space to develop the story, the voice of the storytelling. We had a year to actually write the script and storyboard the film, just the two of us. That allowed us to challenge each other but also keep the voice in a very specific realm. From that point we could go to a crew of 350 people and say, "This is the

I THINK THE STUDIO IS FAR MORE ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT FINDING STORIES OFF THE BEATEN PATH THAN THEY WERE WHEN THIS WAS FIRST PITCHED. — CHRIS SANDERS

film we're making," and sit down with every animator and every background painter, everyone involved, and say, "There's a very specific sensibility at hand here and here it is."

CS: One of the things we found out is that people appreciated the clarity. You worry a little bit that you're going to seem like [snooty accent], "Oh no, this is what I want to do, I won't have any of those other suggestions!" But they appreciated the clarity, and liked the purity of the story coming through.

AO: You've emphasized that you like extremely detailed storyboarding — not just movement, but also lighting and staging, close to the storyboarding for a live-action film.

DD: Both Chris and I have a philosophy — it isn't entirely shared within the studio — that composition and lighting are vital in storytelling. We're very specific

and detailed about involving the background, the cinematography. Our choices of where to put the camera and how to light the scene compositionally have such an effect on us in our storyboards that it's automatically communicated to the rest of the crew. That means there's less of a discussion by the time it comes to layout. There might be an issue here and there about camera direction or whatever, but for the most part, our storyboards tend to translate exactly to the screen.

It's not an entirely shared philosophy on other Disney productions. It's a personal choice... It's a little more work but ultimately it makes me feel more like a director because I have more visual control of how my script pages are executed.

AO: Can you talk about the different forms *Lilo & Stitch* went through as it developed?

CS: Its earliest origin was as a failed children's book I tried to do back around 1985. I was doing the book on my own time, and came up with a character I thought was really fantastic and unique. It was the prototype for Stitch. He looked a little bit different, but he was pretty much Stitch in personality. I abandoned that because I realized the character was so subtle, there was no way to develop him successfully in 24 or 32 pages. I thought it was going to end up being too subtle, too intellectual. A great deal of writing was going to be needed to support that character, and that's a little bit contrary to a picture book. So it sat on the shelf... Around 1996, Tom Schumacher approached me and asked if I was interested in pitching a story, and so *Stitch* was revived.

DD: Chris pulled out this character and the story that involved him, which was about an alien who had crash-landed in a forest and the other forest animals who had sort of left it alone.

CS: The forest version would have been developed if we hadn't had the first meeting with Tom in the Salon hotel. He made the timely comment that the animal world already seems alien to us so the contrast wouldn't be very great, so we should consider putting the story in the human world.



Lilo & Stitch began as an idea for a children's book over ten years prior to it becoming a feature.

DD: From the point when Chris pitched it, he was encouraged to develop it. That's when we started talking about it, off the clock. For a short while it was about a boy and an alien in Kansas.

I SPENT MY ENTIRE WEEK IN THE HOTEL — I ORDERED IN FOOD AND COFFEE AND WORKED ON THE OUTLINE. — CHRIS SANDERS

AO: Might Stitch have worked with a boy?

CS: Your natural inclination is to say a boy and his dog, and that's what we thought would be a good idea, this little boy in Kansas. But we both felt simultaneously that the soft nature of the story, plus the nature of Stitch's change, was going to require a female influence. I think Stitch represented a male character

CS: I went away to Palm Springs, of all places. It was the Christmas break, between Christmas and New Year. I spent my entire week in the hotel — I ordered in food and coffee and worked on the outline. I was so concerned that people reading this outline might get the wrong impression that I put at least one drawing on every page. I thought, by the time people finish reading this, then if they don't like it, it'd be because



The element of Elvis Presley was added to give the story some levity.

so the balance would be to put him with a little girl. We wanted someone who was going to be in conflict with Stitch, and we realized a little boy might be a comrade (laughs). The relation would be, "Break that! Woo-hoo! This is great!" We would have two characters reinforcing their bad behavior. It would have been fun but we wouldn't have had the conflict; we wouldn't have had a story. A little girl would be the proper character to frustrate Stitch. In that conflict, we would have a story about if they were going to get along.

DD: So it became about a girl in Hawaii and there was a slow evolution of ideas...

they really didn't like the property. I was going to make sure they saw the same thing as I did! I also wanted a self-contained pitch, so that if I wasn't in the room it would be able to pitch itself pretty effectively.

The curious thing was that it ended up being, in a sense, the book that I never made back in 1985. It was a lot of work but I produced it pretty much in two weeks.

DD: By the time Chris' outline was officially submitted and had some illustrations, it was largely the story it is now, aside from a few things — the fact Stitch had a gang, there were a few characters missing, that sort of thing. It started in a slightly different place but

the bulk of the story and characters were pretty much the same.

AO: Some scenes in *Lilo*, such as the screaming match between the sisters, are both very funny and yet quite uncomfortable to watch. It's new territory for Disney.

CS: I think it's a microcosm of the effect of the film, which is that you can't have a tender scene, a reconciliation, unless you go through a scene that's uncomfortable and probably crosses the line. We had just finished *Mulan* where we had both a father and mother — which is rather unusual — and a grandmother, and the structure of their family is a very rigid one, which was totally appropriate in that film. In *Lilo*, we wanted to completely break away from that and so we felt, what's the most inappropriate thing for Lilo and Nani to do... Well, instead of reasoning it out their frustration, they're just going to yell at each other, exactly like brothers and sisters really do. It was so freeing to do those kinds of things.

After the fight, Lilo and Nani reconcile in the bedroom... It's a really tender moment where they reconcile and confess to one another that they've pushed and yelled at each and they're sorry. It's nice because we operated on this philosophy that a lot of times people in real life don't come out and say what they want. They try to do it in a different way, because just going and saying it is a little uncomfortable. So Lilo and Nani had these wonderful scenes where they're really apologizing to each other for yelling without saying it as flatly as, "Boy, I'm really sorry. Let's make up," and stuff like that.

The only thing we had to do was go back and reinforce was that they were sisters. We had a few confusions after our first screening, with people wondering why Lilo and her mother were yelling at each other and how inappropriate that was! So in the second version of the bedroom scene they mention a few extra times that they're sisters. We wanted to make sure people understood that.

DD: The whole film was really about testing boundaries. Particularly with the character of Stitch... It's a redemption story, so we knew we had to make him really manic and wild and misbehaved and then take him from a point of being almost completely unlikable to very vulnerable and loveable. We knew our story existed between those two extremes, so that was part of the process of testing how far we could go. What Chris and I like to do is not only imbue very human traits into the characters — making them very fallible and giving them little moments of nobility here

and there. We also like to incorporate real-life problems. We have this whimsical and at times ridiculous, fantastic backdrop, the whole alien presence, but we also wanted to deal with the issues of loss and what is a family and how do you define that? Being this is a Disney film, there's a certain legacy of family themes. It's kind of neat to update that and include all those people who might have not previously been considered part of families. The Hawaiian ideal is that you define a family for yourself. That can be a community, that can be a circle of friends or blood-relations, and one does not negate the other.

WE WERE INSPIRED BY THE WAY MIYAZAKI CREATED REALISTIC RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE HUMAN CHARACTERS...AND WOVE IN A REALM OF FANTASY AND WHIMSY VERY SUBTLY.
— DEAN DEBLOIS

All of these topics were on the table and we wanted to find... I guess poetic ways of getting those ideas across without hammering them. Like the death of the girls' parents, for example. We didn't want to spend a lot of time dwelling on it because we knew it was a dark issue. It was about balance, trying to balance the whimsy against the weight. We discovered the pacing of the story as we went on. At one point in development, our act two dipped into a very dark place for a long time. We had several sequences back-to-back, which were just low and depressing in spirit. We needed some levity to balance them because we had to get the audience ready for what they were going to go through in the third act.

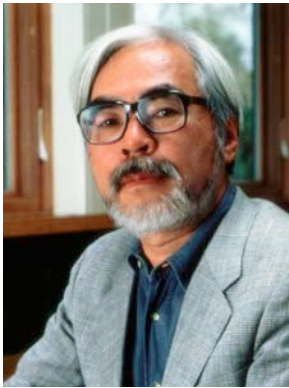
AO: Is that why you put in the part about Lilo trying to make Stitch into Elvis?

CS: Exactly, and the surfing sequence.

AO: It's reported that you were influenced by [Hayao Miyazaki](#), the Japanese director of [Spirited Away](#).

CS: His stories are everything but cliché. There's never a cliché I've ever detected in his stories; the storylines are completely original and the way the characters interact is very believable. I think that's one of the things that inspired us to rewrite the book in the way our characters interact. You referenced that when we were talking about the scene with the sisters yelling at each other. It's so natural and cathartic to see that going on. When characters interact believably, you believe in them and it makes

it seem much more real to you. One of the big reasons we didn't have this film as a musical in the traditional sense is that the minute a character begins to sing, it places that film in a certain realm, a musical realm, which is great but it's not really happening the way we wanted this film to feel like it's happening.



Sanders and DeBlois were influenced by animation master Hayao Miyazaki's deft skill at creating credible relationships in his movies. © 2002 Nibariki. TGNDDTM. All rights reserved.

DD: Specifically, if you reference a film like Miyazaki's *My Neighbour Totoro*, that film shares a lot of similarities with ours. We were inspired by the way Miyazaki created realistic relationships between the human characters, the sister-sister relationship, and wove in a realm of fantasy and whimsy very subtly. It's done in such a believable way... You've got these fantastic elements and yet you feel like you watched a story that really existed between a family.

AO: The original climax to *Lilo & Stitch* involved an aeroplane flying near skyscrapers. Can you talk about how that was altered after September 11th?

CS: The sequence exists almost entirely intact. It was just a matter of changing a few elements. It was something we all wanted to do... There was really no discussion. We met the very next day and thought, "How can we change this?" It only took a few weeks and it really works in much the same way. It's almost shot-for-shot the same sequence, it's just instead of skyscrapers, there's now a mountain ravine, instead of a 747, there's Jumbo and Pleakley's spaceship. The plane was digitally pounded into a different shape.

CG is always misleading. The things that seem difficult actually aren't. You ask, "Can we change the shape of this whole object?" — "Oh yeah." So you're like, "Oh really? That's not hard? So can we change the color?" — "Oooh [laughs], that's going to take a while..." It all seems so backwards. We had a fantastic artist named Brian Jefcoat and within a few days he had reshaped everything.

AO: *Lilo & Stitch* has been a big critical and commercial success. How much of a blueprint do you

think it sets for future Disney films?

CS: We wanted to make a film that explored an unusual, quirky story, a more personal story. At the same time it was less expensive so it bought us freedom. Because the film has been a financial and critical success, the door's going to stay open for a while. I think the studio is far more enthusiastic about finding stories off the beaten path than they were when this was first pitched. So it's a proven experiment and hopefully we can take advantage of it again for the next couple of pictures.

AO: You're now involved in an upcoming TV version of *Lilo & Stitch*.

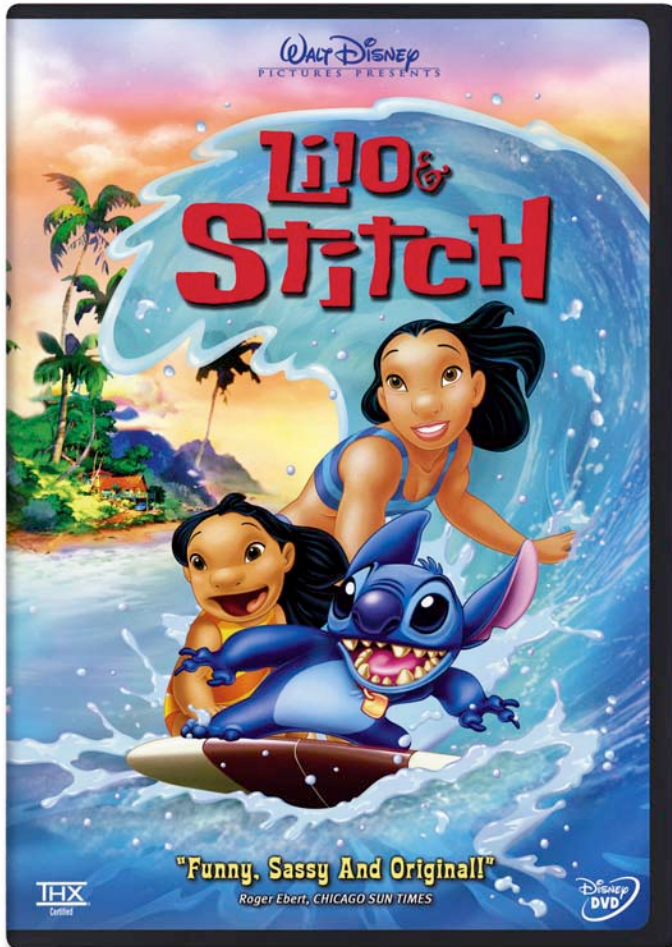
CS: There are two things going on. There's a weekly TV series for Saturday morning, to be shown next year, and there's also a direct-to-video sequel. Both will take up where the film ended and continue the story, which is natural given the original film is almost a prequel to the rest of the characters' lives. We've brought this family to a point where they're going to hang together. There's such a neat relationship between all the characters. The spinoffs explore something we were never able to explore with our film. We're envious of the guys doing that; we only look

WHAT HAPPENED WITH THIS FILM IS THAT THE STUDIO UNDERSTOOD IT WAS GOING TO BE SOMETHING UNUSUAL AND QUIRKY AND UNIQUE FOR DISNEY STORYTELLING.

— DEAN DEBLOIS

in on it now and again. It's good to see what these guys are doing and get a fresh perspective. They enjoyed the subtleties, the quirks, the things I think made the movie interesting and they're working hard to maintain that.

Everyone realized that if you're going to get something like that to market, you have to start way in advance. We felt strongly that *Lilo and Stitch* could lend itself to other things, so we started working with the spinoff guys quite a bit before the film was released. In animation terms, this is coming out at blinding speed!



The *Lilo & Stitch* universe is expanding; the DVD was recently released, and a video sequel and TV series are in the works.

AO: Will the spinoffs be inspired by the picture montage on the closing credits?

CS: Not really... It'll all be new kinds of stuff.

AO: Can you make any comparisons between the creative processes in a cinema movie and TV show?

CS: The needs of a half-hour show are quite different... A weekly problem for the characters to face up to, something that creates conflict. The fun thing is because you've only got a limited time to deal with it, you can be

IT WAS ABOUT BALANCE, TRYING TO BALANCE THE WHIMSY AGAINST THE WEIGHT.

— DEAN DEBLOIS

much broader in what that problem is and the solution to it. (Laughs.) Subtlety takes a while to develop... The direct-to-video enjoys more of what we had on the original film, so it can have subtler things going on. It's interesting, because we can take the characters and their relations both ways. I thought it might be difficult, but it feels very comfortable doing both things.

AO: The obvious problem with turning a cinema feature into a TV show is the lower TV budget. How do you ensure it doesn't disappoint fans of the film?

CS: The original film dismantled a lot of the machinery of our other features. We were going for something that was more inexpensive to create, without being impoverished. I think that's going to be good for the spinoffs. I've seen the preliminary artwork for both the DTV and the TV show and they're doing their best to give the same watercolor background, which is really the foundation. In a sense, the watercolors do everything for you. They give you the soft palette, the lush look, the relaxed feel and then the rounded characters flourish. You probably couldn't have a more convenient basis for a weekly series.

AO: Can you give any hint of what happens in the DTV sequel?

CS: I wish I could (laughs)... They're still in development so if I said something they'd probably come back to me and say, "We changed that!" ■

ANDREW OSMOND is a freelance writer specializing in fantasy media and animation.

HOLIDAY SPECIALS

She-Ra is Comin' to Town?

by Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman



The one that started it all: *Mr Magoo's Christmas Carol*. © 2002 Classic Media.

SOMETIME BETWEEN 4 AND 7 BCE, LIKELY DURING the month of October, a baby by the name of Jesus Christ was born in ancient Palestine. During the time of his ministry Jesus surely noticed that every year between the 17th and 24th of December the local populace gave it up for the harvest god Saturnus and partied down in a ritual celebration known as the Saturnalia, a holiday marked by the giving of small gifts and the license to play harmless practical jokes on friends (or so we are told; this is the same culture, after all, that had gladiators hacking each other to fettucine). One hundred and thirty years later, after the humble carpenter had gained quite a following, a Bishop of Rome named Telemachus co-opted the Saturnalia, declaring that the Nativity would now be celebrated in December. However, old habits die hard and in 274 AD the Emperor Aurelian declared December 25 to be "Natalis Solis Invicti," or, "the birth of the invincible sun." The whole megillah was settled for good by Pope Julius I who made December 25 the "official" birth date of Christ.

THE EVOLUTION OF CHRISTMAS

In Europe (and later in America), Christmas was dutifully observed, but the real blowout was reserved for New Years. For centuries, this day was the capstone of the Holiday season, replete with feasting, rowdiness, riotous consumption of alcohol, and the giving of gifts. New Years held sway in America until around 1820, when the two holidays finally merged into one big Season; Christmas became a domesticated family holiday while New Years retained more of the profligate aspects of the celebrations. In 1823, a Christmas poem entitled *The Children's Friend* first introduced "Santa Claus" to American children in protean form; it is here that Santa first acquires a reindeer-powered sleigh. In 1834, Clement Moore shaped the modern Santa Claus mythos with his landmark poem, *Night Before Christmas*.

Somewhere around 1850, German influences brought the Christmas tree into American homes, and St. Nicholas — Santa Claus — became the "patron saint" of the holiday. Although merchandisers had considerable difficulties settling on a depiction of

RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER WAS ORIGINALLY INTRODUCED TO THE PUBLIC IN A MONTGOMERY WARD SOUVENIR BOOKLET IN 1939...



Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer graced the cover of a Boston newspaper's television guide in 1964. Courtesy of RankinBass.com. © 2002 Rankin/Bass Productions.

Saint Nick, they were greatly helped by cartoonist Thomas Nast, who depicted the character annually from 1863-86 for *Harpers Weekly*, and by the various artists (such as Louis Prang) who drew the character on merchants' "trade cards." By 1890 the Santa we know today was more or less finalized. So was the holiday known as Christmas, by now America's penultimate shopping and gift-giving holiday, responsible today for almost one-quarter of America's annual retail profits (and forty percent of its yearly credit card debt). Still, there was one more Christmas milestone to be reached: 1962 saw the premier of the first animated Christmas special made exclusively for TV.

A TRADITION BEGINS

As United Productions of America slowly fell from the premier position it held as animation's artistic vanguard during the 1950s, studio president Abe Saperstein found that he had few commodities that were suitable for the television market. The sole profitable property remaining was Mr. Magoo, and the myopic codger was pretty much down to his last cane. Still, Quincy Magoo had one great inspired turn left in him, and the UPA staff under director Abe Levitow coaxed Magoo to his greatest performance ever. The role was Ebenezer Scrooge, and the special was *Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol*. Sold to NBC and sponsored by Timex, the hour-long special premiered on December 18, 1962. That evening, as Dickens' beloved tale unfolded with surprising impact and style, something more magical than flying reindeer happened; Christmas and animation came together in an unbreakable cultural fusion that exists to this day.

This fusion was greatly helped by the fact that four of the first Christmas TV specials were, in many ways, the best and most beloved of the one hundred and thirty

that exist today. Mr. Magoo was joined in 1964 by Rankin/Bass studio's most memorable special. Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, the creation of one Robert L. Mays, was originally introduced to the public in a Montgomery Ward souvenir booklet in 1939 as part of an ad campaign. The winning story made its way into popular culture; ten years later songwriter Johnny Marks penned a saucy little tune about the misfit ruminant and Gene Autry made it a high-flying hit. It remained, however, for Arthur Rankin, Jr. and Jules Bass to provide the most enduring visuals ever to accompany the music. Through the use of stop-motion puppets that were cuter than a bushel of sugar plums, the studio interpreted the Rudolph myth as an adventure complete with romance, danger, heroism, and some of the best male bonding since *Spartacus*. Some sparkling additional tunes by Marks himself surely helped, and so did the addition of Burl Ives, whose warm, grandfatherly interpretation of Sam the Snowman had the North Pole (and viewers) melting with delight.

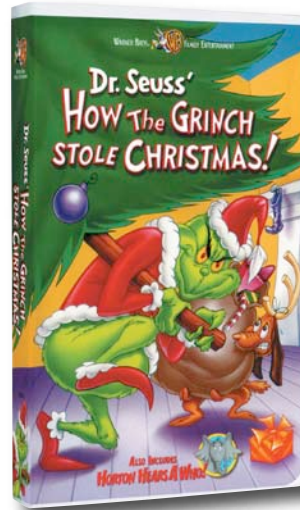
One year later [Charles Schulz](#), Lee Mendelson and the Coca-Cola Company teamed up to bring America, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. This special began as a documentary about *Peanuts* creator Schulz but did a quick revision when the sponsor, Coca-Cola, began casting about for a Christmas special. The special was produced under tremendous pressure; Schulz wrote the script outline over a weekend, and the entire show was animated in six months. The results were stunning. On December 9, 1965, Bill Melendez' faithful animated renderings, Vince Guaraldi's snappy jazz score, and a scrawny Christmas shrub became an indelible part of Christmas. *A Charlie Brown Christmas* was a triumph of personality animation, one that enshrined the *Peanuts* gang as cultural icons while gently questioning that same culture's values. Not long after that, old Army buddies Chuck Jones and Theodore "Dr. Seuss" Geisel hooked up for the first time since working on ["Private Snafu"](#) cartoons back in the 1940s. Jones adapted Geisel's story *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* for a TV special. On December 18, 1966, *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* stole a nation's heart as well. Geisel contributed a marvelous story; Jones redefined it using his impeccable skills in character design, timing and expressivity. When two professionals of such caliber collude and then sign up Boris Karloff as narrator, the result can only be a legendary animated Christmas special — which *Grinch* undoubtedly was.



Charlie Brown's pathetic little Christmas shrub became a visual icon for the push and pull between capitalism and the reason for the season. Courtesy of ABC / United Features Syndicate.

Following these four charming entries, animated Christmas specials descended on the networks like a blizzard straight out of the North Pole. Some of them were forgettable folderol featuring such lightweights as the Mirthworms while other specials, particularly those produced by Rankin/Bass, became synonymous with the season. Established characters such as Fred Flintstone, Yogi Bear and Garfield took their turn beneath the mistletoe, while the raucous ragamuffins of *South Park* actually originated as an animated "Christmas card." Even [Ren and Stimpy](#) managed to clock in with a Yuletide tale. Perhaps no special was as freakish as Filmation's 1985 offering starring He-Man and She-Ra (who would seem to be more comfortable worshipping Serapis than the man from Galilee). The Christmas specials eventually splintered into two genres, some with a religious message and some with more secular intent. The former camp generally dealt with the birth of Jesus and the events thereof, as in Rankin/Bass' *The Little Drummer Boy*.

THE BEST SYNTHESIS OF THE TWO CAMPS IS PROBABLY THE CHARLIE BROWN SPECIAL...



The triumvirate of Chuck Jones, Theodore "Dr. Seuss" Geisel and Boris Karloff made *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* a legendary Christmas special. © 2002 Warner Home Video. All Rights Reserved.

The latter sort of special was more variegated and dealt with Christmas legends, the solving of a crisis that would "save" Christmas (often due to the incapacitation of Santa Claus), or a quest to discover the "true" meaning of Christmas. This camp holds by far the bulk of the Christmas specials and reflects the confusion that American society has long held in regard to the holiday.

AN UNEASY RELATIONSHIP

In his excellent discourse on American holidays, *Consumer Rites*, sociologist Leigh Eric Schmidt notes that: "The American marketplace has served for more than a century and a half as a site of competition about the meanings of Christmas. The contest has revealed deep ambiguities in the culture — fundamental tensions between asceticism and indulgence, simplicity and affluence, piety and spectacle, religion and consumerism, Christ and culture...a site of not a little ambivalence, paradox, and contradiction." As always, animation is inseparable from the culture that produces it. The best synthesis of the two camps is probably the Charlie Brown special, but then, Charles Schulz had been slipping morsels of piety into his comic strip all along and was probably best suited to pull this complicated stunt off. In many of our animated Christmas specials the origin of Santa or the celebration of a peripheral holiday character (such as Frosty the Snowman) vies with the story of the Nativity

THE GRINCH CARTOON SEEMS TO DEFINE THE "TRUE" MEANING OF CHRISTMAS AS INDEFATIGABLE CHEER...

told in others. At times the "true" meaning of Christmas seems to be unconnected to the birth of Christ and is defined more as a spirit of unselfishness or altruism above and beyond the call of duty. The Grinch cartoon, for example, seems to define the "true" meaning of Christmas as indefatigable cheer in the face of Yuletide deprivation. Or is it more a measure of the "true" meaning of Christmas to observe what sorts of commercial pitches are played during breaks in these Yuletide antics, sacred and secular alike?

As for those specials in which Christmas must be "saved," this is usually due to the fact that some evildoer must be defeated or because Santa Claus must receive some sort of physical or spiritual assistance. In both cases, a gallant hero (or heroes) saves the holiday. Most of the time they are richly rewarded with the largesse of "Christmas spirit," and even the black-hearted villain winds up touched with a healthy dollop of the same. The Rudolph legend as interpreted by Rankin/Bass is particularly representative: In the face of a gargantuan blizzard Santa dolefully informs his distraught workshop that, "We'll have to cancel Christmas." Since Christ has long since been born and the faith he founded an established fact, there is not much chance that Christmas can be negated in the first place; what is jeopardized is actually the delivery of presents and the material trappings that have come to symbolize the holiday. There is little confusion, however, in the minds of young viewers; Rudolph (with his nose so bright) bravely comes to the rescue, a savior equal to the Birthday Boy himself.

Perhaps, given the history of Christmas in America, this is not nearly as odious as it sounds since the coexistence of both marketplace and church has never been truly antithetical. During the time in which this country moved to the forefront of world power, both free-market capitalism and religious faith have grown in strength to the point where they are consistently factors (for good and ill) in major political policies and decisions. The threat of radical terrorism is a menace to both fixtures and has driven them, if anything, deeper into each other's arms. If there is a true meaning to Christmas, American style, it is probably acceptance that this holiday will always



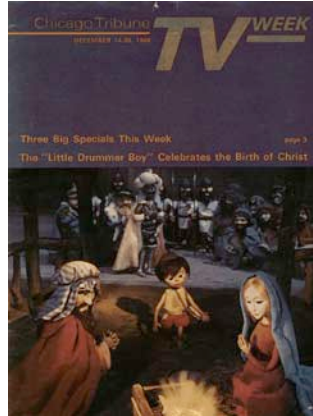
Burl Ives (left) and *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* song-writer Johnny Marks combined forces to make this Christmas perennial. Courtesy of RankinBass.com. © 2002 Rankin/Bass Productions.

embody a contradiction between our Puritan heritage and the aggressive influence of capitalism — right down to our Yuletide cartoons.

These animated specials have flavored the holidays like nutmeg and holly, gobbled up for two generations as if they were ribbon candy, eggnog and candy canes. The best of these presentations reaffirm animation's vital but underrated contribution to our culture, and if you would quibble with this, just try to imagine Christmas without them. For many a young child who has furtively peeked in the closets during the interminable countdown to Santa's arrival, these holiday cartoons embody the spirit of the season, a



The Little Drummer Boy (1968) is one of the few religious animated TV specials shown at Christmas. Courtesy of RankinBass.com. © 2002 Rankin/Bass Productions.



harbinger of that magical morning soon to come. Surrounded by toys, games, ribbons, bows and scads of crumpled wrapping paper, isn't a child's delight part of the "true" meaning of Christmas — especially in a consumerist society that never settled its own ambiguities about the holidays? To ask a half-hour cartoon to resolve or begin to sort out the contradictions is asking far too much; let's simply switch on the set, light up the tree, and catch the twentieth rebroadcast of *The Year Without A Santa Claus*. And could you please pass the ribbon candy? — yes, the *cinnamon* pieces! ■

To learn more about Rankin/Bass, check out the books *The Enchanted World of Rankin/Bass: A Portfolio* and *The Making of the Rankin/Bass Holiday Classic: Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* available from www.rankinbass.com

MARTIN "DR. TOON" GOODMAN is a longtime student and fan of animation. He lives in Anderson, Indiana.

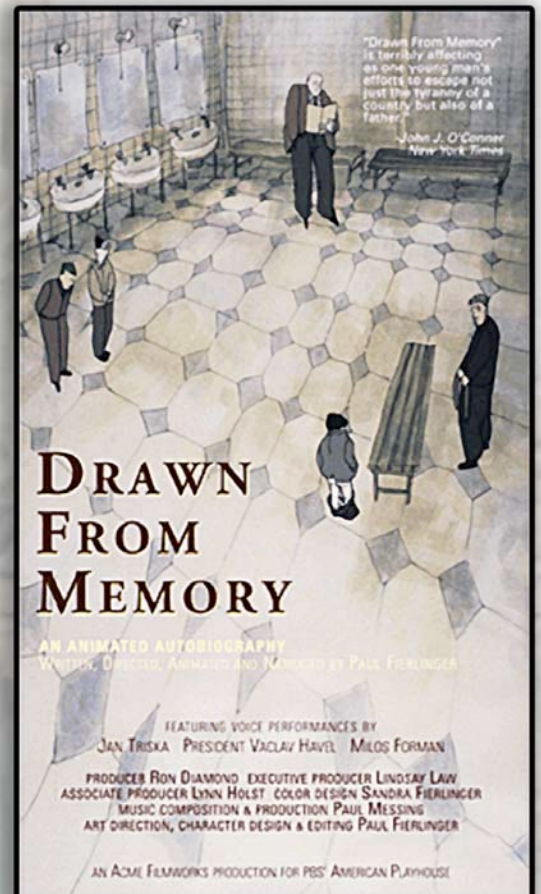
Paul Fierlinger's DRAWN FROM MEMORY *Now Available on Video!*

"Drawn From Memory is an extraordinary reminiscence about an improbable but true life, rendered in pen-and-ink images as whimsical as those of James Thurber and words as piercing as those of

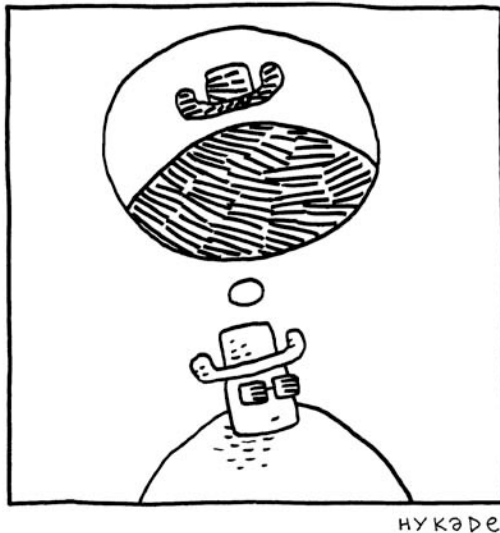


Milan Kundera. The work, which could be called *The Movie of Laughter and Forgiveness*, uses the lighthearted medium of animation to heartbreaking effect."

—Carrie Rickey
The Philadelphia Inquirer



<http://www.awn.com/awnstore/acme/drawn.html>



IT'S HOCKEY SEASON. I JUST GOT A COPY OF AN NFB DVD that included one of my fave toons, *The Sweater*. And this month, Disney is releasing a collection of Goofy cartoons on DVD that includes the wacky *Hockey Homicide*. In 1996 I programmed a series of animation films about hockey that included both of these films. They are well animated and designed — blah, blah, blah — but what struck

CANADIANS PERHAPS TRUST AND THINK TOO MUCH, LIKE CHILDREN REFUSING TO LET GO OF SANTA.

me was their very different views of hockey. First off Canadians are apparently obsessed with hockey. It's their religion. That's true to a degree, but mostly it's just media driven nonsense. It's like saying that all Americans are gun toting, war loving, flag waving, SUV driving, right wing assholes with mall-coiffed trophy bitches. Besides, hockey has a long history in the U.S. dating back to 1898 when Harvard began playing varsity games. The first U.S. team to win the Stanley Cup was the 1917 Seattle Millionaires. A year before that, the Portland Rosebuds lost in the finals to the Montreal Canadiens. Point being: the U.S. has as much hockey history as Canada, albeit not as sweepingly intense. Still I was struck by how each film seemed to echo its nation's ideologies.

TWO TAKES

Hockey Homicide features only Goofy characters but isn't part of those usual "how to" films with Goofy trying to learn some new sport. There ain't ANY attempt to understand hockey here (and that's part of the joke). The film opens with a wide shot of a non-descript hockey arena. Hockey as island, a moment out of

ANIMATION PIMP

Meaning? Meaning **WHAT** Exactly?

by Chris J. Robinson

Two Takes on Hockey

Insignificant and occasionally interesting contributions to the cognition of reality...

Illustration by [Andreas Hykade](#).

Courtesy of Chris J. Robinson.

nowhere, existing outside of society. The narration comes on at a blistering horserace meets auctioneer pace. Before you can even grasp where the hell you are...the game turns into an endless stream of violent madness. There is no logic, no context or history, just chaos. The players beat the shit out of each other. No moment to stop. No trust. Always moving forward. Space is brutalized, dominated, controlled. As the multiple Goofy faces suggest, there are no individuals, no identities. Everyone is the same. Depersonalized. There is no respect for the opponent. They are to be beaten. Plain/simple. Everything reduced to extremes. As the pace of the madness increases, the images (and announcer) lose control. We see whales, baseball games, airplanes, an assortment of unrelated images that rival Bunuel. The final shot shows the players sitting in the

AMERICANS ARE GREEDY, AGGRESSIVE PEOPLE.

stands watching a massive brawl on the ice between the fans. The narrator huffs and puffs as he barely manages to emit his final punch line: "That's why they call hockey a spectator sport." Ba ha. Ha.

The Sweater (1980) is based on a short story by Quebec writer, Roch Carrier. Set in 1946 in a small village in Quebec, the story is told from the perspective of a young boy. His days are dominated by hockey. When he is not listening to the Montreal Canadiens games on the radio, he is playing hockey on the local rink with his friends. The boy and his friends all wear Montreal sweaters and aspire to be Maurice "Rocket" Richard, the most famous Montreal player. One day the kid's Canadiens sweater becomes too small. His mother orders a new one, but when the package arrives he discovers a Toronto Maple Leafs jersey inside. The Leafs are the most hated hockey team in

 THE KEY IS TO BE ABLE TO ACCEPT THE ABSURDITY OF YOUR EXISTENCE WITHOUT ANY BITTERNESS.

the world! Despite the kid's bitching, his mother insists that he wears it. Now the boy must go to the rink with his blue and white sweater and join the boys who all wear the red, white and blue sweaters of the Montreal Canadiens. When the boy finds himself riding the pine for most of the game, he snaps, screams, "This is persecution!" and breaks his stick. Suddenly, a very menacing, larger than life pastor appears, tells the kid off and sends him to church to ask for God's forgiveness. However...the boy asks God to send moths to eat his Maple Leafs jersey.

If there is a film that captures the essence of a Canada that was, it's *The Sweater*. Hockey is part of daily life in this world. It is deeply connected with childhood, family, language, culture, and even religion. The radio games bring together family and community. The rink becomes a stage, a dreamland as the boys impersonate the Rocket in the hopes that they can escape their small town. More specifically (at least in *The Sweater*), hockey brings the people of Quebec together. Rocket Richard is more than a hockey player... he is a leader, a god, a rebel, whose every goal against those anglo fucks from Toronto represents a small victory for the Quebecois. Richard carries their hopes of one day overcoming poverty and anglo oppression. He inspires confidence, passion and defiance. In 1954, Montrealers rioted the streets after (English) NHL President, Clarence Campbell, suspended the Rocket for the entire playoffs after he punched a referee. That's what Richard meant to Quebec.

How can you not see these films as reflections of national identity? In *Hockey Homicide* (even the title has violent overtones), hockey is foreign, therefore it is something to be mocked and feared. No attempt is made to understand the logistics of the game. "We don't get it, so umm...fuggit, it must be stupid." This is a world where I exist for me. I do what I must do to survive. Fuck everyone else. React first. The John Woo school of diplomacy. Break the doors down, open fire, then ask questions. In this world, one does not stop, think or attempt to communicate. That's for hippies, commies and faggot preverts I guess. Canadians, on the other hand, do not view hockey as some isolated event. It is deeply entwined with social and cultural life. Of course, there is something innocent and naïve about this. Insecure Canadians too easily swayed by the mystique of a game grant hockey more importance than it warrants. For all its romance, hockey was mostly an escape from poverty, a chance to be somebody, to be adored by thousands. But Canadians have filtered out all the hedonistic qualities and turned hockey into some glorious Greek-like mythology about community, family

and togetherness. "Hockey is part of us." But hockey was NEVER just a game (at least at the NHL level). Richard, their moody hero, lived a decent life, but was seriously exploited and underpaid by his wealthy owners. He was little more than a racehorse and when these horses could no longer run, they weren't quite shot, but they were tossed aside and forgotten, left to the hushed whispers of myths that wring the darkness into light. "The good of the game" we often hear, a load of hogwash, all of it. Canadians perhaps trust and think too much, like children refusing to let go of Santa. Sometimes I wanna slap them around and tell them to grow the fuck up. (Just as I want to do the same with all you animated folks who continue to dumbify animation.)

WAIT A MINUTE...

Hockey can be a ruthless and violent business-show and yet it can also be as graceful as dance and as spontaneous and unexpectedly beautiful as music or hell even animation. A few years ago I didn't think that way...I thought the American film was so typical of those stupid fucks while *The Sweater* was a perfect reflection of Canadian innocence. Too quick to pin things into an either-or column. "OH...that's so typically American." "Oh...that's just like the Italians..." We do this because 1. we're dumb asses and 2. because it's as comforting as a silk robe. When we reduce we make the world comprehensible. We know what to expect. There are no surprises. Americans are greedy, aggressive people. Canadians are calm, Thoreau types at one with nature. With these easy to file labels the world feels less tense, less unpredictable.

But kids everything in this world was (is) built on tensions (there's the heaven-hell tiff or the big bang theory). We were built through tension (aggressive sperm trying to bully egg). Aggression is part of our nature. I'm not saying, "Hey, let's bomb Iraq!" nor am I saying that the so-called war on terrorism is right. It would be more logical if Bush and company just came right out and said, "Okay, look. We're rich. We wanna get richer. We want to protect our interests and we want to rule the world and have control of oil. At heart we're greedy, paranoid people who find meaning in wealth and power because we had bad childhoods and hey...you can't do a damn thing about it." Of course, if we were told the truth we'd, ironically, grab our guns and revolt (anyone see [Phil Mulloy's](#) *The Chain?*) creating more aggression and tension. But still when you just cut to the chase it makes more sense than this nonsense about ridding the world of terrorism and evildoers — as David Cross said it's like trying to declare war on jealousy — but at the same time, isn't

the whole 'why can't we just get along and give each other a big fucking hug movement' just as often stupid, self-serving and idealistic? Our entire lives are played out within the pull of good and bad. But good and bad are suggestions encrusted over time as truth: It's 3 am. I'm at a red light. There are no cars. Good means you wait 'til the light is green. Bad means you go through the red. But both logic and my aural and visual senses tell me there are no fuggin cars. It's 3 am, I'm dead tired. I want to go to bed. I go through the red light. Was it good? Maybe not. Was it right? Sure it was. Good does not mean right. This is truth.

And while we're talking about me, we, hockey and animation, who are WE anyway? What is this meaning we (I) try to carve into everything? We're just accidents of evolution and our life has no purpose other than the meaning and purpose we inscribe it with. And really everything we create whether it's a hockey game, walk in the park, animation, alcohol, heroin, organic farming, or the Bible (one of THE funniest books ever written) is really just some form of distraction from this very meaninglessness. As someone, somewhere said, we all die equals. That's a downer.

But hey...fella...don't cry. It's okay. There's a line from a Canadian novel that suggests that the key is to be able to accept the absurdity of your existence without any bitterness. That's tough to do but I can

easily accept the absurdity of YOUR existence with no bitterness whatsoever. It's coming to terms with my own overall irrelevance that's the kicker. It's a choice between being Donald Duck or Goofy. Between the latter's "hu-hu-hu-huh" take it or leave it attitude or a duck who takes life so bloody personally emitting an angry incomprehensible saliva stormed self-centred rant everytime things don't go his way. I dunno bout you, but I ain't quite goofy enough yet.

Meantime...go check out the new Disney DVD of Goofy shorts and try and be more open to the possibilities of hockey.

And hey...happy holidays. ■

Walt Disney Treasures: The Complete Goofy. *Walt Disney Home Video, 2002. UPC 78693-6179-057. 326 minutes.*

Leonard Maltin's Animation Favorites from the National Film Board of Canada. *Image Entertainment, 2001. UPC 14381-0241-2. 95 minutes.*

CHRIS J. ROBINSON is but a man. His hobbies include squirrel taunting, goat thumping, meat dancing and elderly peeping. You can find the results at <http://asifa.net/robinson>



AWN'S ONLINECHAT IS NOW LIVE!

AWN is pleased to announce that our online chat room is open! So, drop in, start a discussion and get to know your animation comrades around the world. Be sure to check in regularly for an opportunity to chat with noted animators and industry professionals scheduled to appear.

 <http://www.awn.com/vchat>

CAREER COACH

Time to Review

by Pamela Kliebrink Thompson



T

HE END OF THE YEAR IS A GOOD TIME TO DO SELF ASSESSMENT AND set goals for 2003. We all have the same amount of time — 365 days in a year and 24 hours in a day. What you do with your time is what makes the difference.

REVIEW YOUR GOALS

What did you accomplish this year? What did you learn? What did you want to do but never got around to? Is it still important to you?

SET NEW LONG RANGE GOALS AND WRITE THEM DOWN OR MAKE A DREAM BOARD THAT VISUALLY DEPICTS THEM.

To do this, think about:

- *What makes you happy.* What activities — business and personal — bring you the most pleasure? What would you enjoy learning more about?
- *What your skills are.* What do you do better than anyone else?
- *Areas that need strengthening.* In what ways do you want to grow and develop? What important areas have you been avoiding because you're afraid you'll fail? What skills would you need to acquire to succeed in those areas?
- *What the trends are.* What skills is your company looking for in new hires? What skills are in demand by employers you want to work for?
- *Whether you can get the cooperation of others.* Don't be shy about asking for support for your goals from your family and friends. To accomplish your goals you will need the help of those around you. Make sure those people know how important your goals are to you.

MAKE A PLAN ON HOW TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS.

If you know what your long-term goals are, you can take action toward your top priorities each day.

Here's how to use your time to meet your long-range goals:

- 1) Review long range goals.
- 2) Devise strategy/plan to meet goals. Make list of steps to reach goals.
- 3) Make list of daily to dos relevant to goals. To spend time on tasks that will help you accomplish something of real value, make a to-do list.

THE FIRST STEP IS THE HARDEST.
BEGIN THE JOURNEY TODAY.

When you make a to do list, weigh the activities for their personal and professional importance. Don't spend time on tasks that don't advance you toward your goals. To accomplish something of real value, set a list of priorities and stick to it.

To set daily priorities:

Make a list of everything you should do tomorrow. Highlight those tasks which:

- give you the best return on your time and energy
- are essential to your goals
- are essential to the goals of your company
- can be done only by you

REVIEW GOALS AND PRIORITIES REGULARLY TO ENSURE THAT YOU ARE USING EVERY DAY TO REACH YOUR OBJECTIVES.

Rate the tasks in order of importance — #1 being most urgent, etc.

If you have set daily priorities, at the end of every day you should have done something toward reaching your goals. These small steps will eventually lead to larger accomplishments.

Acting on priorities:

Review your to do list and start the day with top priority jobs and stick to them. Visualize yourself completing the task and get started. Picture the rewards you'll get and make sure those rewards are meaningful to you. Whenever your motivation lags, use this visualization method to get revved up again.

Do the most important tasks first. Your daily priorities should help you toward reaching your long-term goals. Spend time on tasks with the greatest potential payoff.

On your daily priority list include items from the long-term list that will move you toward your goals. Take some action toward your top long-range priorities each day.

Delegate lower priority jobs, if you can. If you have to do them yourself, take a 5 or 10 minute break for them. Don't work on them for longer than the short break. Schedule another short break for them later.

Here is an example of a long-range goal and an action plan/strategy and to do list/priority list to accomplish it:

- 1) Set goal: Get a new job in the animation industry.
- 2) Strategy/plan includes making five new contacts per week, attending two networking meetings per month, reviewing and updating resume, portfolio and demo reel, and submitting marketing materials to at least five employers per week.
- 3) To do list: Review and update resume. Make new demo reel. Draw animals at the zoo. Attend life drawing class to beef up portfolio. Ask friends to help review marketing materials. Ask friends for job leads.

REVIEW YOUR BUDGET

Pay attention not only to what you are spending your money on, but, more importantly, what you spend your time on. Avoid distractions like television, email, Internet and video games. These all can consume your day in no time.

If you haven't been paying attention to what you are spending your money on, start now. Know what your financial needs are and start saving a little each month.

Review goals and priorities regularly to ensure that you are using every day to reach your objectives. Life is full of change and what's important to you today may not be vital in the future. Be flexible and re-evaluate regularly to be sure that your life is on track with where you want to be and where you want to go.

If you don't have enough time to do a large task, realize that all big accomplishments were done one small step at a time. The first step is the hardest. Begin the journey today. ■

Resource: Managing Your Priorities from Start to Success by William Bond. New York, New York: McGraw-Hill Trade, 1996. 150 pages. ISBN: 0786303875 (US\$16.95).

PAMELA KLIEBRINK THOMPSON is a career coach and recruiter who plans on setting some long-range goals that will help her make the most of 2003.

CG STUDIO

Visual Evolution: Creating Zoic Studios



Zoic's permanent facilities boast state of the art technology. Left is the reception area and on the right, an employee takes a break in the kitchen and relaxation area.

by Loni Peristere



Loni Peristere finds Zoic like standing at the crossroads of an exciting new era in visual effects production. All Zoic photos by Raoul Bolognini.

IT IS AN EXCEPTIONAL TIME IN THE EFFECTS INDUSTRY. SOFTWARE AND hardware have come down in price and complexity, allowing the traditional artist and filmmaker to come into the once-foreign computer side of the business: sculptors have become 3D modelers; painters and architects have become 3D environmental specialists; directors of photography and gaffers have become lighting TDs; stuntmen have become motion-capture subjects; and directors direct animated scenes that look as realistic as the ones they once captured with an Arri 2. With a broader talent pool and more intuitive programming, we are stronger and more capable than ever to create unique imagery without the interruptions of buggy programs. And any bugs that remain are being worked out by a digital consortium of Jedi masters, who have trained today's senior artists and developed the user-friendly software we non-mathematicians can understand and work with.

THE TIME IS NOW

Zoic was formed because a group of people saw an opportunity to further a model for visual effects production, which is heavily reliant upon partnership, where visual effects are done in pre-production, making the post process the finishing process it was intended to be. As our primary projects tend to be short turn around (commercials, episodic TV), this model might seem unattainable, but we insist on it. This early communication and design allows for a clear creative process, rather than a reactive "fixer upper." Our resume stands tall over five previous

THE PERMANENT FACILITY WAS BUILT WITH OUR "FREEDOM OF ART" MODEL...

companies because of this model. With each move, we have carried our projects and relationships along with new partners to the next, with Zoic being the last stop — our stop.

In July of 2002, Chris Jones, Andrew Orloff, Steve Schofield and I found ourselves in a distinctive situation. We had left our previous employers, and yet had the direct responsibility for producing the visual effects for four network television series, which had begun production: *Angel*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Firefly* and *Miracles*. We could move once again to another company, or launch a company of our own with the artists we had trained and love. The new company idea had crossed our minds before, but the costs for a start-up seemed unattainable without a significant up-front investment. But we were lucky, as the software we were buying from Alias, Discreet Logic and Newtek had come down significantly in price over the years. A license, which had cost tens of thousands of dollars, was now a

OUR QUICK BUDGET ON A NEW STUDIO FOR 35 PEOPLE WAS UNDER A MILLION DOLLARS...

fraction of the cost. As were our start-up costs. Our quick budget on a new studio for 35 people was under a million dollars — way under if we kept our compositing on the desktop for episodic production. Thankfully the new versions of Adobe After Effects and Discreet's combustion were also 10 times as powerful as they had been in years past, and Andrew Orloff (3D supervisor) and Chris Jones (compositing supervisor) felt confident that they could achieve the same level of quality on the desktop that they had achieved in the past on Discreet's Inferno or Flame. We also knew if we purchased only what was necessary, we could save our pennies for the bigger ticket items and infrastructure in the coming months. So we began small and grew fast.



Lower software licenses made the start up of Zoic easier. Above, partners Andrew Orloff (left) and Loni Peristere confer. Other founding partners are Steve Schofield (bottom) and Chris Jones (not pictured).

THE TOUGH START

More important than any machine or method is artistic talent. Projects just don't sing without strong creatives behind them and Zoic would not fly without a remarkable talent pool. To our advantage, we had a proven reputation and solid high profile contracts. Our reputation and methods for production made the recruiting process easier than it would be if we were starting from scratch. We didn't have to sell ourselves to creative partners or talent; we were allowed to be

selective and cautious as good talent and contracts follow good talent and contracts. The first pass for us in recruiting was easy as many of the lead artists we wanted for the series had worked with us across various effects houses and projects. We called on them as partners in a process and looked for their guidance and assistance to fill out the roster. Rocco

render farm finally came up for final elements, we had to once again work through the myriad of issues with buggy temp render controllers and bad IDE drives. We had to go through this process without the luxury of historic back up and band-aids, which tend to accumulate over the years at any effects company. These issues cost us time and money. Again, we were



Zoic created *The Serenity* for the 20th Century Fox TV show *Firefly*. Courtesy of 20th Century Fox and Zoic Studios.

Passionino, Emile Edwin Smith and Kristen Brannan had run *Firefly* for the pilot, which went flawlessly. Mike Leone and David Funston had run *Buffy* and *Angel* for Andrew Orloff. The second round of recruiting stemmed from the first and we are still immersed in a very selective third round.

Once crewed up and networked, we began daily operations in temporary space. Where many episodic effects teams wait on production, we began in advance, using storyboards to create animatics, using the animatics as a shooting draft and key, finishing elements, and finally getting into post for tracking, lighting and compositing with live plates. The temp space was the most challenging part of the start-up. Our network was often unstable, the 2D and 3D renders had to be done locally, and when the rental

fortunate enough to have strong talent and support to create and fix on the fly. Our system administrator worked day and night to pitch and patch our way into successful production, while our artists worked

WE HAVE ALSO SPENT A GOOD DEAL OF TIME TRAINING AND RECRUITING A STAFF THAT IS WELL-ROUNDED.

around the seemingly unforeseeable obstacles associated with all new equipment, which was faster than ever but very temperamental. Meanwhile, we were building our permanent infrastructure with care and consideration off-site. This is a continuous process as you can always do better over time.

WE ARE EXCITED ABOUT THE WORK BEING PRODUCED AT ZOIC.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

The permanent facility was built with our "freedom of art" model in mind, which meant resolution independence, flexibility and speed. Due to cost reductions, we could afford to build bigger, faster and stronger than any of us had imagined. Today we have a 100 proc render farm, two terabytes of network storage, 25 CG workstations, six Combustion compositing stations and one HD Flame. The Flame is our luxury extravagance and is used for the real-time video assemblies and audio laybacks we have to do while supervised by our advertising agency and commercial production clients. It is an indulgence, which may not be necessary for the next generation of effects companies, but is today. This complete infrastructure, accompanied by a custom shot-tracking system, is a growing testament to the requirements for rapid turn around. It allows the visual effects teams to focus on their shot



CG supervisor Emile E. Smith and visual effects producer Kristen Branan discuss *Firefly*'s schedule.

and its importance to the story being told, rather than the shoe leather which often accompanies setting up a shot and getting it to the next level. These tasks are automated.

Finally, we have also spent a good deal of time training and recruiting a staff that is well-rounded. Although each individual has specific strengths, they can all produce a shot on their own at their computer. They have and do author unique work. This ownership of a shot gives them pride in their work and confidence to do more. They may not always do it all, but they can, which provides early versions of heavily layered shots



Zoic designed and executed this Alliance bomber for *Firefly*. Courtesy of 20th Century Fox and Zoic Studios.

that are composited. These pre-comps allow us to make decisions early, which may have been held back until late in the game in the past. These decisions allow us to produce better work, which gives our creative partners the encouragement to do more.

We are excited about the work being produced at Zoic. In six months, we have already done a myriad of projects and styles. We use digital doubles for stunts, CG people for backgrounds we cannot afford in production, 3D set extensions when we run out of ceilings or different looking buildings on the backlot, and recreate entire live-action scenes, which might have been missed in production due to a heavy schedule. In the near future, we will have entirely photo-real day and nighttime environments, with which we can enhance or create whole scenes. This isn't unique, except for the fact that we do it in episodic time, in six weeks instead of six months! ■

LONI PERISTERE is visual effects supervisor on the new Fox television series, *Firefly*, and as well as on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*. Peristere is creative director at the new visual effects company Zoic, after previously serving at Radium, POP and Digital Magic, where he worked on both episodic television programs and major commercial campaigns.



3D ANIMATION

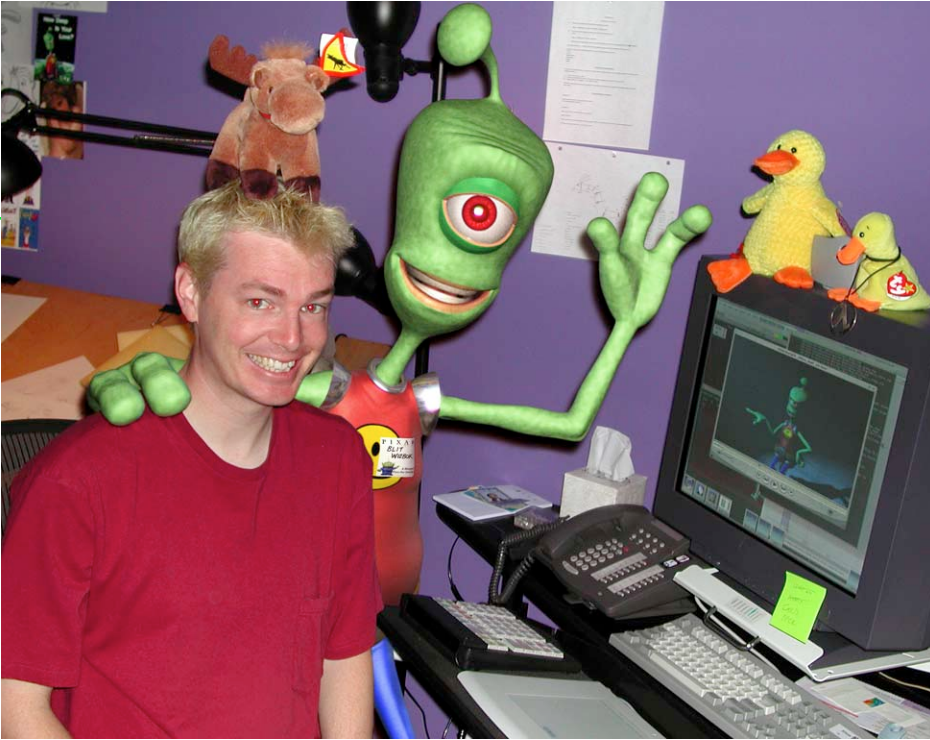
Power to the People: Animation:Master Makes 3D Work Possible for Everyone

by Darlene Chan

Take a look at why *Alien Song* became a huge Internet hit, bringing attention to Victor Navone's talent and to the Animation:Master software program. © 1999 Victor Navone.

MONEY HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE ACCESS KEY TO KEEPING UP WITH THE LATEST INVENTION THAT WOULD MAKE LIFE EASIER AND MORE EFFICIENT.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER, BUT THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF MANKIND, knowledge has mostly been kept in the domain of the affluent and privileged. Money has always been the access key to keeping up with the latest invention that would make life easier and more efficient. The lovely thing about the computer age is that knowledge has become more democratized, and especially through the Internet, is easily disseminated. In the past two decades, we've seen homemade recording studios rival professional facilities. The iMac and Final Cut Pro let one make a short film in an apartment that can be entered into festivals. Another recent development in this proletariat computer revolution is Animation:Master (A:M) by Hash. Up and coming animators swear by it. It's affordable, can be used easily by one person, and lets the animators get to the job of animating more readily. This month, *Animation World Magazine* asked four animators about their experience with Animation:Master, why they chose to work with it, how it has helped their careers, aspects they would change and aspects they love!



Victor Navone and his alien creation. Photo credit Sofia Saile.

VICTOR NAVONE

Victor Navone is a traditional artist and computer animator born in San Diego, California, in 1970. After receiving a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts and five years as a conceptual designer and CG artist at Presto Studios, he began studying 3D character animation in his spare time. In 1998 he achieved massive popularity with Alien Song, via the Internet. He now animates for Pixar Animation working first on the feature Monsters, Inc., and now a new short film. He still works on his own projects as well.

I began using A:M in 1998 while employed at Presto Studios. I was looking for organic modeling software on the Mac and I had heard good things about A:M's spline modeler. As my interest in character animation grew I found that A:M had a powerful set of tools for this, so I began building my alien character "Blit" on the fly and setting him up for animation. I completed three test animations with Blit, the last being *Alien Song*, which got the ball

rolling for me.

I found the animation tools to be relatively easy to master, allowing me to focus on the nuances of the performance. The non-linear, layerable animation scheme allowed me to combine lip-synch, walk cycle and custom animation. The fact that A:M runs on both Mac and PC was a bonus for me, as I had a Mac at work and a PC at home. Once I had completed *Alien Song* I found that it was becoming very popular and being spread across the Internet by email. I began getting a lot of attention and offers for work, most notably from Pixar. Luckily I had the foresight to burn my name into the movie so that people could find me.

I always have a laundry list of feature requests, and no software is perfect. There isn't anything I would necessarily change about A:M, so much as add. Things like better support for multipass rendering and compositing techniques and more flexibility in surface and rendering attributes. I am currently using A:M for my next short film called Big Bang.

"LUCKILY I HAD THE FORESIGHT TO BURN MY NAME INTO THE MOVIE SO THAT PEOPLE COULD FIND ME."

— VICTOR NAVONE



Killer Bean 2 has become so popular that another sequel is in the works. © 1995-2001 Jeffrey Lew.



A:M allowed Jeffrey Lew to eliminate cumbersome tasks and get to the heart of animating quickly. Courtesy of Jeffrey Lew.

JEFFREY LEW

A graduate in electrical engineering from Columbia University, Jeffrey Lew taught himself animation by using Hash Animation:Master and various books. He began Web designing after college, and using his knowledge of 3D animation, he created the character The Killer Bean, inspired by John Woo's The Killer. Jeff is now currently working on the upcoming Matrix 2 at ESC Entertainment.

I love A:M. Plain and simple. I don't really think about using anything else for character animation. It was really the only choice for the budget I was in and its capabilities. At the time, the only other package that could do what Animation:Master did in terms of character animation was around \$8,000. Animation: Master is \$300. It was an easy decision. On top of that, the required computer was rather on the low end. I didn't need a \$5,000 workstation. I love using cheap PCs. It makes me feel better when I finish the project. Also, A:M's file sizes are way smaller. Scenes use less memory and disk space, and that translates to more speed also.

Also, A:M lets you focus on animating. You are not bogged down by completing multiple steps for one task. In A:M, one task is one step. This was great for letting me learn the art of animation. Learning software is easy. Learning how to animate is hard and takes a long time. So when I got hired by animation studios, I knew how to animate, I just had to learn software.

I would like to see an animation export option to other packages, just in case you want to render in something else. FX features are more advanced in other packages and my animations have a lot of explosions! But really, it's no big deal in the end. I can always render in two different packages and composite them together later. But if there's a moving camera, then it gets more difficult.

"LEARNING SOFTWARE IS EASY. LEARNING HOW TO ANIMATE IS HARD AND TAKES A LONG TIME."

— JEFFREY LEW

Of course I will use A:M again on *Killer Bean 3*. With A:M's speed and capabilities, why would I use anything else? The thing I love the most about A:M is the streamlined GUI for just plain animating. A:M simplifies a lot of the steps in 3D. Simplicity of how you work lets you flow when you animate.

Killer Bean 1 was done in A:M v4. *Killer Bean 2* was done in A:M v7.1. There is tremendous difference between the two. A:M v4 is very outdated now. The methods are old. I will probably use A:M v9.5 for *Killer Bean 3*. Every version has great advancements. I think the greatest thing about 9.5 is the ability to use an inexpensive gaming video card to accelerate your 3D in A:M 9.5. It is very fast. I'd be silly not to use it. In 3D software, it's all about being faster, cheaper, faster, cheaper. Quality of animation is really up to the animator.



Conrad Chow found that Animation:Master helped eased his transition from classical animation to 3D work. Photo credit Rachel Wei.



Using Animation:Master on *Snapshots* allowed Chow to concentrate on the story instead of getting tied up on the technical aspects of animation. © Conrad Chow 2002.

CONRAD CHOW

Conrad Chow, a native Canadian, applied to the classical animation program at Sheridan on a dare, got accepted and found his calling. Since then he's made the conversion from 2D to 3D animation and has been working as a freelance animator/digital artist.

I've been using Animation:Master on and off for about five years now, mainly for personal projects but also for some professional work too. Like all 3D software or anything else in life there is a learning process you need to go through, sometimes steep and

to focus on my strengths and what I know. A:M didn't force me to delve too deeply into the role of TD. I was able to concentrate more on the animation and story and less on the technical aspects of 3D animation.

As for jump-starting my career, *Snapshots* hasn't reached the extraordinary popularity of other A:M shorts, such as Victor Navone's *Alien Song* or Jeff Lew's *Killer Bean* and probably never will. That's okay; it was never my intention. I'm already extremely thankful and flattered at the response I've received thus far. Although I have managed to turn a few heads it hasn't really done too much for me career-wise just yet, but I do have a few things in the works... That's all I can say for now.

Hash has released its Animation:Master 2002 (v9.51b) and is currently working on v10. I'm still using v8.0 and 8.5. I haven't even touched v9 yet, so you could say I'm a little behind. In the past A:M has been criticized for its stability but it has been pretty solid for my purposes thus far. I've never been one to get too preoccupied with the latest technologies and features. I just try to create the best product I can with the tools I have available.

On my next personal project I will use A:M again. I actually have one on the shelf right now that I keep meaning to get back to. It is of a different 'flavour' than *Snapshots* but hopefully, once it is completed, it will be well received.

"COMING FROM A CLASSICAL ANIMATION BACKGROUND I FOUND THAT THE TRANSITION TO A:M WAS FAIRLY SMOOTH AND FOR THE MOST PART PRETTY PAINLESS."

— CONRAD CHOW

other times simple. I'm not so sure if I'd be a good benchmark but coming from a classical animation background I found that the transition to A:M was fairly smooth and for the most part pretty painless.

There's no doubt that *Snapshots* could have been created with other 3D software but I chose to use Animation:Master because of its intuitiveness and ease of use. Like on any independent short the creator is required to take on many roles, but A:M allowed me



Kastelic only became interested in 3D animation after learning about Animation:Master. Before that, he felt the cost for 3D software was prohibitive. © Bugbrain Studio & Orlek Band. Production: Bugbrain Studio & Emotion Film.



Even though he has a love/hate relationship with Animation:Master, Kastelic will certainly use it on his next project. Photo by Branko Klancar.



Perk came about after Dusan Kastelic saw Animation:Master at work in *Alien Song* and then The Orlek Band asked him to animate a music video. © Bugbrain Studio & Orlek Band. Production: Bugbrain Studio & Emotion Film.

DUSAN KASTELIC

Dusan Kastelic is an illustrator and animator from Slovenia. He was a geography teacher by profession, but after one year he decided to pursue animation. Since then he's worked as an illustrator, graphics designer, comic author, games programmer and lately as an animator. He recently established his own studio, Bugbrain.

I'm having a very passionate relationship with A:M. There's kind of a love-hate relationship between me and Animation:Master. I love its price, logical user interface, great tools for modeling and animation (which could easily rival those from high-end 3D packages) and last but not least, a lot of enthusiastic users from the A:M Mailing list, willing to help you at any time, day or night.

I love the program much less when it crashes in the middle of the work.

If there wasn't Animation:Master I would probably not be working with 3D animation at all. Before that I was more interested in 2D animation and I didn't have any plans to move to 3D. I was sure that you needed a big studio with a few dozens animators and very expensive software to make a good 3D animation. Then I accidentally saw the short film *Alien Song* by Victor Navone. I was very impressed by its quality and the fact that it was made by a single person and \$300 software. At the same time friends from "The Orlek Band" were asking me to make an animated music video for them. They had 2D animation in mind but I decided to try in 3D. I didn't know anything about 3D animation at that time and in my ignorance I was sure

that I would finish it in a month or two. I learned everything I know on that project and it took almost a year to complete (every free minute and many sleepless nights).

Rendering could be faster — users of inexpensive software like A:M usually don't have enough money to buy big renderfarms. I would also appeal to developers of A:M to focus on stability rather than adding new features. We could simulate radiosity, soft-body dynamics and fancy stuff like that, but we can't simulate stability. Although, I have to emphasize that, in the latest versions, stability has greatly improved!

With recent price drops of 3D packages, I was tempted to switch to some of the more professional programs for future projects. I even downloaded a few demos, but after playing with them for a couple of days, I realized that the biggest investment is not the money we spend for the software, but time we spend to learn mastering it! I don't want to spend another few months learning another program. I would rather spend that time working on a concrete project. ■

DARLENE CHAN is managing editor of Animation World Magazine. After receiving a bachelor's degree from UCLA, Darlene happened into the motion picture business and stayed for 14 years. She served as a production executive for Paramount Pictures, Walt Disney Pictures, Davis Entertainment and Motown. She produced *Grumpy Old Men* (1993) for Warner Bros. In 2000, she joined Animation World Magazine.

CGI COLLISION

Inside the Icebergclub

by Annick Teninge

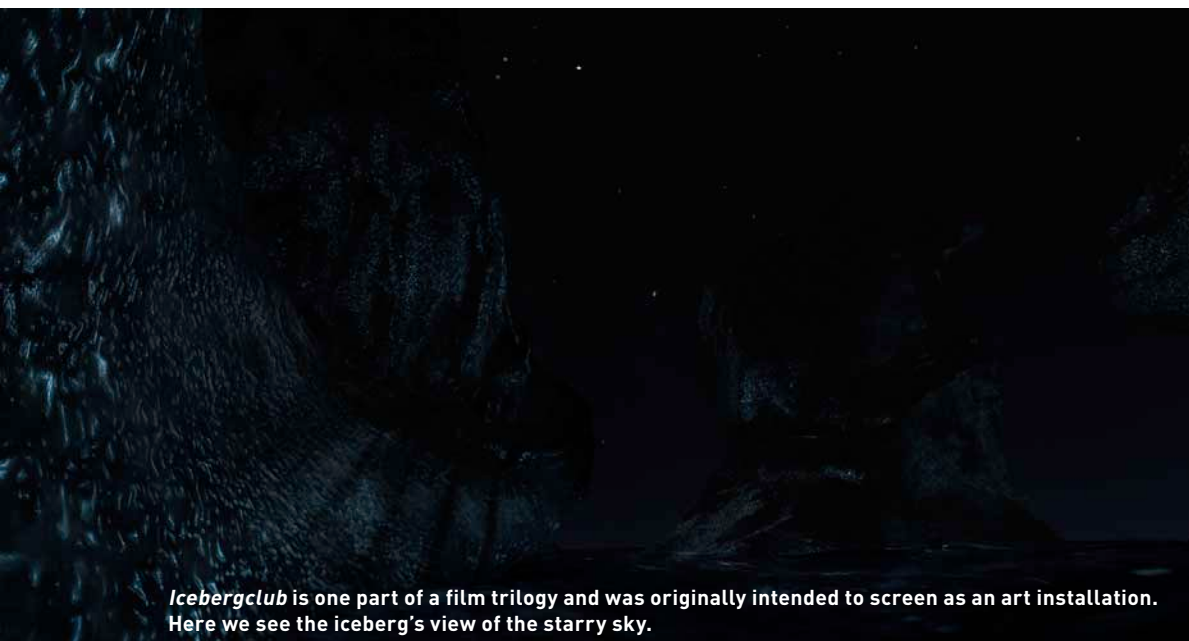
See a slice of [Icebergclub](#) online. All images courtesy of Jean Pascal Princiaux.

"HAVING ICEBERGCLUB SCREENED IN THE OFFICIAL COMPETITION PROGRAM WAS A BREATHTAKING, SCARY EXPERIENCE."

WHILE JEAN PASCAL PRINCIAUX CONTENTS HIS film *Icebergclub* is not meant to be a controversial film, it indeed was when it screened at the 26th International Animated Film Festival at Annecy. For thirty-two minutes, one takes the iceberg's point of view and watches the *Titanic* slowly approach on that fateful night in the north Atlantic Ocean. The photo-realistic, CGI film moves tremendously slowly as the iceberg drifts along in the ocean, taking in the stars and sea, prior to the crash. Some people sat captivated, others walked out in disgust and still others reveled in the film, hooting and hollering their derision. *Animation World* decided to find out what was behind this film that caused all the hubbub late one night and was the talk of the festival the next day. "What did you think?" "What did it mean?" "Well, I heard..." "Well, that's not quite what I heard..."

If the purpose of art is indeed to lead us into discussion and to question previously held beliefs and opinions...then *Icebergclub* succeeds on all levels.

"MY GOAL WAS TO SET UP A HIGHLY SYMBOLIC MECHANISM THAT COULD ALSO BE MACHIAVELLIAN."



Icebergclub is one part of a film trilogy and was originally intended to screen as an art installation. Here we see the iceberg's view of the starry sky.



A self portrait by Jean Pascal Princiaux.

Annick Teninge: Over the entire course of the Annecy Festival, your film *Icebergclub* caused the greatest reaction from the audience. There was some clapping of support but a lot of hollering, whistles, etc. Did you expect this? Did it upset you? The Annecy crowd is known to be brutal.

Jean Pascal Princiaux: I must say I was surprised to be in the competition at Annecy. I had thought the film might be shown in panorama, or in an informational program as an experimental film. Having *Icebergclub* screened in the official competition program was a breathtaking, scary experience. But it was a great test, because the Annecy audience is so reactive. I was able to analyze almost in a mechanical way how people were positioning themselves. There were three categories of people in the audience: people who didn't like the format of the film and didn't want to get into it; people who thought they would have a bit of peace while watching it; and people who were switching from one feeling to another. Those were the noisiest, the ones going back and forth during the entire film. When the collision was coming, they seemed to be ready for it and encourage the impact.

AT: Was this how the film was intended to be screened? I had heard that it was an art installation or was supposed to play on multiple screens; is this true? What is your background?

JPP: I come from the contemporary art scene where I have been presenting my films and installations at personal and collective exhibitions for about ten years. I am facing the same reserve in this contemporary art world, where I cannot be categorized.

This film is part of a three movie pack, *Icebergclub*, *Casinoclub* and *Fourrésclub*. The three of them are intended to be shown simultaneously, thus allowing viewers to make connections between more or less heterogeneous elements. In *Casinoclub*, the subject absorbs substances that make him mix up extrasensory perceptions with internal ones. And in *Fourrésclub*, the subject finds himself in a square of scrub and cannot find his way. This three movie pack is part of an art installation where the viewer wears a movement-detector helmet and can simultaneously watch any of the three movies on multiple screens.

AT: I must say that after one gets used to the idea of just sitting and watching...without the expectation of things happening...the film becomes a very relaxing experience, even though the subject matter is of an immense human tragedy. I also felt as if you were making a point that the elements, earth and all her mighty forces, remains unchanged by man's tragedies and unharnessed by his triumphs. It is a very powerful film without having a typical story structure. What was the point of the film? What were you trying to show or prove?



"I TRIED TO MAKE THE FILM CAPTIVATING, NOT BECAUSE OF ITS SUBJECT MATTER BUT BECAUSE OF ITS FORM."

Viewers are lulled into tranquility while watching the sea, but once the ship appears, there is a creeping sense of tension. Here we see the aftermath of the collision.

JPP: My goal was to set up a highly symbolic mechanism that could also be Machiavellian. In popular imagery, the iceberg is evil but one can be led to change one's position and my point was to bring the audience to change its viewpoint on the event. Watching the film is also a very relaxing and exotic experience, insofar as one can move (travel) from thinking evil to good, or from evil to victim in the same way as the human beings on the boat.

I didn't want to have a moral point of view, or to represent human beings with feelings and deal with character psychology. It seemed more interesting to me to keep a neutral position and to present a very shorn environment. I also wanted to avoid having causal linking in order to highlight the deep-rooted mysterious aspect of the notion of an event. Usually, we deal with events in a causal way, with explicative sequences of events. I wanted to reduce this to its minimum in order to get closer to the substance of the phenomena that becomes an event, not the event itself.

AT: You are claiming a neutral position as the filmmaker. Is this contradictory with your Machiavellian intentions?

JPP: No. Again, I don't have a moral point of view. I'm taking a stand as far as I bring into play a specific type of proposal: offering to decode the event from the iceberg's point of view and to look at it outside of its causal logic, focusing on its conceptual substance. This is an artistic proposal. I am not taking sides.

AT: There is a risk of detachment with such a minimalist environment. Was it a concern of yours?

JPP: I used cinema tricks such as constant variation in the lighting, textures and movement, even if the variations are very subtle. I tried to make the film captivating, not because of its subject matter but because of its form. *Icebergclub* is made to be seen as an art piece, certainly not as a polemical film, or a provocative one.

AT: How did you evaluate the duration of the film?

JPP: I figured it was the time needed to allow people to switch their point of view. It was a very intuitive process. I approached the film as an abstract expressionist sculpture, where you manipulate a block of material until it takes shape. ■

Visit us online and check out a [clip from Icebergclub!](#)

To learn more about *Icebergclub*, *Casinoclub* and *Fourrésclub*, visit Jean Pascal Princiaux's Website at www.jppclub.com.

After five years as AWN's general manager **ANNICK TENINGE** returned to France, where she is now in charge of production and distribution at La Poudrière in Valence, an animation school offering a 2-year program where students study the process of filmmaking and develop their own film projects. She is also heading AWN's marketing and public relations efforts in Europe. Annick began her animation career as assistant director at the Annecy International Animation Festival, a post she held for six years.

GERMAN FESTIVAL

Documentaries and Animation: Not Such an Odd Couple

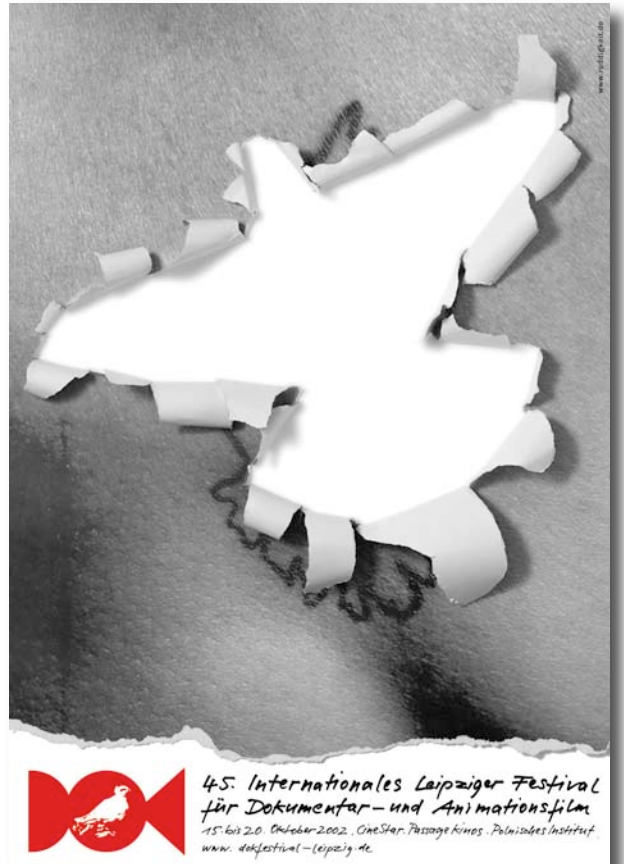
by Annick Teninge

ONE OF THE MOST RESPECTED FESTIVALS IN THE documentary arena, the Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film, held its 45th edition October 15-20, 2002 in Leipzig, Germany. In addition to the official selection, Animation for Children and New German Animation programs, this year the festival featured Russian master Yuri Norstein, Polish animator [Jerzy Kucia](#), and Polish illustrator, cartoonist and animation director [Jan Lenica](#), who passed away last year.

Leipzig is the only festival that unites the animation and documentary genres in one big international gathering. I decided to have a closer look at the purpose of the festival through a conversation with Fred Gehler, festival director, and [Otto Alder](#), who is in charge of animation.

Annick Teninge: Why did you create an animation and documentary festival? Was the idea to bring together the poor relations of the cinema family?

Fred Gehler: It was a subjective decision to bring together two art forms that have many things in common. A significant number of avant-garde films from the '20s and '30s used animation, and animation has always enriched documentary films. One can mention documentary filmmaker and painter Juergen Boettcher, or the painter Lutz Dammbeck, who made documentaries using his paintings and is now working on a feature-length documentary using animation. The history of the festival also comes from the city's roots in art. Traditionally, Leipzig has been a city of painters and comic-book writers with a natural curiosity towards animation. For that matter we have an annual comic-book convention where the organizers schedule animated films, in collaboration with the Leipzig festival. And although there are no



The Leipzig Festival is the only gathering that unites animation and documentaries at one international festival. All festival photographs courtesy of Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film unless otherwise noted. Photographer: Uwe Frauendorf.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT THIS CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE GENRES IS THE FESTIVAL'S HEART?

— ANNICK TENINGE

animation studios in Leipzig, there is a great interest in animation, notably from art school students, mainly coming from graphic and book design. And I guess there is my personal interest in animation.

Originally, the festival only had a competition for documentary films. In 1993, a reflection within the festival organization led to the decision to have an animation competition beside the documentary one. Launched in 1994, the animation competition was biannual until 1998 and became annual in 1999. The public goes to both documentary and animation screenings and this year we've had a record audience for animation, which now represents one third of the attendance.



Fred Gehler (Left) opening the International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film. The Leipzig Festival paid posthumous tribute to cartoonist and animation director Jan Lenica this year.

AT: The audience is mostly local. Is the festival's goal to increase international professional participation?

FG: We would love to welcome more international professionals, but we have to be realistic. Our financial means do not allow us to invite many professionals. Nevertheless, our programming is very international and from this aspect the festival can be compared to other international animation festivals.

AT: Why did you decide to open the festival with *Bowling for Colombine*, already shown on many screens throughout Europe?

FG: Michael Moore's *Roger and Me* was a big hit at Leipzig 1989. I saw *Bowling for Colombine* in Cannes last May and it was obvious for me to show it at the festival. The problems Moore is raising — violence and fear — are not just U.S. problems and sadly, this is a very topical film. Earlier this year, we had a bombing in a German school.

AT: Was Moore's style a problem for documentary purists?

FG: I don't think so. He has a very personal directing style and likes to put himself forward but it's okay.

AT: Do you feel his trick to get an interview with Charlton Heston was legitimate?

FG: Totally. He might have deluded Heston, but not the public.

AT: Back to animation. Otto, what is your artistic vision for the festival?

Otto Alder: The festival is not an animation shop window. The programming is made for the local public. Therefore, there is no need to select the most representative films of the year. The main idea is to show a wide range of films, some of them funny and light-hearted, and others more provocative or controversial. We try to challenge the audience by striking a balance between different genres.



The International Jury for Animated Film gave *Aria* by [Piotr Sapiegin](#), an honorary mention. © National Film Board of Canada, 2001.

AT: Don't you think this could be said about any festival selection?

OA: Certainly, but it is not radical enough at other festivals. They are more moderate because of their selection process. Committee decisions mean compromises.

AT: Do you receive a lot of submissions?

OA: This year, we presented 179 animated films. Half of them were chosen out of the 300 films that were submitted to the festival, and the other half I chose after seeing them at other festivals. I attend at last three animation festivals per year and choose between 1,000 shorts for Leipzig's program.

AT: Besides the competition, your programming shows a big influence from Eastern Europe: Yuri Norstein, Jerzy Kucia, Jan Lenica.

THE FESTIVAL IS NOT AN ANIMATION SHOP WINDOW. — OTTO ALDER

OA: Yes, but remember the festival traditionally has strong links with Eastern Europe, on top of which we bore thirty-five years of socialism! We were living in a state controlled system and many of these films (Norstein, Kucia) were not shown in Germany before the Wall Fall. Norstein's *Tale of the Tales* was even censored for eight years in Russia. Despite the fact



Otto Alder (right), in charge of animation for the festival, chats with Stanislav Sokolov, a member of the Animation Jury 2002 and an animation-filmmaker from Russia.

that the head of the Russian censorship commission admitted he was really moved by the film, he didn't allow its screening, arguing it was too controversial... And, of course, there is my personal taste for Eastern European culture. I have always militated in favor of their cinema and try to show it whenever I can. Russian films that I selected for the Stuttgart festival long ago are now considered masterpieces.

AT: Fred evoked historical reasons. Otto, from your point of view, what is the reason for bringing together animation and documentary films? Are you trying to bring the animation audience to the documentary genre by appealing to them as citizens? I'm particularly thinking of the PoliTrick program: "Animation Between Art, Commerce And War."

OA: From the beginning, I tried to confront the two genres. As Fred already mentioned, in 1993 animated films were introduced into the competition. But some



The Animation Jury 2002 was comprised of (left to right): Jerzy Kucia (Poland), [Kirsten Winter](#) (Germany) and Stanislav Sokolov (Russia).



Flux by Chris Hinton of Canada won the Golden Dove 2002 for Animated Film, which is the main prize of the festival. © National Film Board of Canada.

documentary people were shocked to see Plympton's facetious films next to serious, political documentaries. So we decided to have separate competitions for documentaries and animation. Then we created the Animadoc program in order to show animation films with documentary-genre leanings. This year, we added the PoliTrick program, which was a great success, even if few people were inclined to engage in the discussion after the screening.

ANIMATION IS SOMETIMES VIEWED AS THE CINEMA JESTER. — OTTO ALDER

Animation is sometimes viewed as the cinema jester. But I think that documentary people should pay more attention to animation. They always try to deal with societal problems in a classical, narrative way, relying heavily on interviews. Animation can deal with these topics in a much more powerful way because it is more visual, more symbolic and uses a universal language. It is also more contemporary in its art form, and more efficient because it's short and to the point. I'm convinced there will be more political animation films in the future because animation is the ideal medium to carry messages.

AT: A television executive was telling me yesterday that animated films could never move her like documentary live-action films do, because of the 'made-up' aspect of animation. When I mentioned Susie Templeton's very moving puppet film, *Dog*, she admitted the border was not so clear. Would you say that this confrontation between the genres is the festival's heart?

OA: Totally. To me, the uniqueness of the festival resides in its potential to bring interaction between documentary and animation films, and to question always the medium in light of the film's message. It is a very enriching experience because we always make progress through confrontation. ■

For prize winners and additional information on the festival, visit www.dokfestival-leipzig.de.

After five years as AWN's general manager, **ANNICK TENINGE** returned to France, where she is now in charge of production and distribution at La Poudrière in Valence, an animation school offering a 2-year program where students study the process of filmmaking and develop their own film projects. She is also heading AWN's marketing and public relations efforts in Europe. Annick began her animation career as assistant director at the Annecy International Animation Festival, a post she held for six years.

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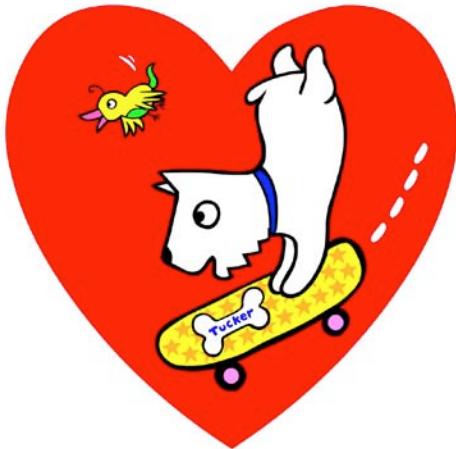
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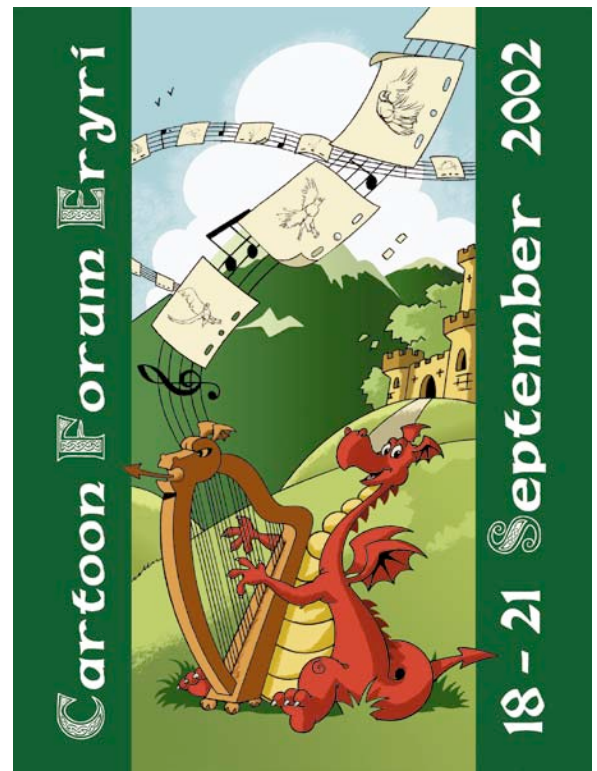
The Cartoon Forum Report

EU MARKET

by John Bullivant



TV-Loonland presented two shows, *Tucker* (above) and *WereKids*, which were well received. *Tucker* © TV-Loonland AG/Tucker 2002; *WereKids* © Telemagination/WereKids 2002.



In the past, Cartoon Forum was relaxed and informal, but this year's gathering was full of competition and pressure. Courtesy of Cartoon Forum.

THIS YEAR SAW WALES AS THE HOST FOR THE 13TH Cartoon Forum. Llandudno on the North Wales Coast, a region that inspired Lewis Carroll the famous writer of *Alice in Wonderland*, was the remarkably pleasant and beautiful location paying host to some 750 European animation and television executives.

BIGGER AND BIGGER

Both Welsh and English executives might be forgiven for fearing that the notoriously wet Welsh weather might put something of a dampener on proceedings. Not so though! The rain politely bypassed Llandudno and gave the visitors from 15 different European countries the best possible feel and sight of the stunning Welsh countryside.

Cartoon Forum just gets bigger and bigger. This year 82 projects, the largest number ever, representing 488 hours of programming with a total budget of 298 million Euros, were being presented. How many of those will end up being fully financed though is anybody's guess. Cartoon is in danger of being a victim of its own success. Only two or three years ago it had the relaxed, informal feel of a festival



Skyland's visual style captivated the largest audience at Cartoon Forum. © Method Films.

rather than a market. Yes there was pressure, yes it was competitive, yes people were there to bewitch the key broadcasters whose support could green-light their show. However, there was always an air of camaraderie, an element of surprise and the real chance of a producer having to fight off competing bids from broadcasters, distributors and potential co-producers for their show.

This year you had the feeling that deals had already been done, broadcasters had the 'sold out' sign up and distributors...well where were they? They were either now producers themselves or in such a precarious financial situation that the mere mention of a distribution advance would have had them

vehicles and strong design the show sparked a lot of interest.

My former employers, TV-Loonland, were presenting two shows. *Tucker*, a 39 x 7-minute pre-school series, featuring the epitome of canine cool, is based upon three books written by Lesley McGuirk of the U.S. Those who attended the show were entertained by *Tucker* bingo, a highly inventive way to hand out prizes to execs who were paying attention. Naturally as an ex-employee I'd love to be able to trash the show big time. Sadly I can't! It was charming, creative and very well developed and one of the best pre-school shows there. The other Loonland show came from in-house studio Telemagination. *WereKids*, 26 x 11' for 6-11 years, is simply best described as *Rugrats* meets *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*! No high concept here, just supernaturally gifted, elementary school kids, out to do battle with paranormal forces in the sandpit. It worked for me and others who had money!

When it comes to stylish and beautiful projects, France rarely fails to deliver. This year's visual feast came from Method Films, Paris a 26 x 26-minute CGI series called *Skyland*. The animation and design were excellent, captivating one of the biggest individual audiences. A futuristic adventure series where huge chunks of urban city blocks float freely through the earth atmosphere, ever in search of water, the question everyone was asking was, "Where will the money come from to produce such a series?" In truth it looked as though it aspired more to being a feature film than a series.

At the younger end, Lupus Films, the new company set up by two former Channel 4 (U.K.) executives, Camilla Deakin and Ruth Jones, presented *Little Wolf's Adventure Academy*, a 52 x 11-minute series, targeted at 6-9 year-olds. Little Wolf, who has

CARTOON IS IN DANGER OF BEING A VICTIM OF ITS OWN SUCCESS.

crumbling at your feet. As we all know it's not the greatest time to be in the kids business and you could feel the nervousness and uncertainty in the air. Few producers, especially the public ones, were bouncing around full of the joys of early autumn!

HOT PROPERTIES

In stark contrast to this were the producers of a new show called *WARP!* Tell Tale Productions, who brought the world the Tweenies, burst into their session in full Formula 1 racing suits, riding mini-cycles as though about to perform a circus act rather than present an animated TV concept. Undoubtedly winning the 'high octane' presentation award, their show *Warp!* was aimed at a 7 plus audience and 13 x 22'. It brought together a group of weird and wonderful creatures for what can be best described as "Wacky Races in Space" — and why not? With fun characters,

always had difficulty being bad, decides to turn Cunning College, an establishment formerly dedicated to producing the biggest baddest wolfs, into Adventure Academy — the best fun school ever! Witty scripts and characterisation together with charming designs made this one of the strongest shows on offer. The series is being physically produced by A



Good scripts and charming designs should make *Little Wolf's Adventure Academy* a hit with the younger set. © Tony Ross/Lupus Films Limited 2002.

Film in Denmark and directed by Karsten Kiilerich. It would appear that A Film and Karsten are Europe's most sought after studio having their name attached to no less than four projects. Besides *Little Wolf's Adventure Academy*, Karsten/A Film were down for *Goliat and The Stone Gang*, 26 x 11-minute for 6-10 years, a revival of a classic Swedish comic book star from Castell Media, as well as one of their own shows *Ugly Duckling Junior*, a 26 x 26-minute CGI series targeted at a family audience and lastly, *If I Were A Grown Up* from Magma Films. I'm not sure Karsten will be too popular with his family if all four shows get financed!

A much respected and talented participant at Cartoon over the last few years has been Happy Life from Sweden. Their projects are invariably strong and their presentations always entertaining. This year was no different. They presented *Last Girls*, 26 x 22' target at a 15 plus audience. Four international young women, reluctantly sharing an apartment in Paris was the premise for this stylishly designed series. The challenge many felt they faced was: could they persuade key broadcasters that an animated series



Goliat and The Stone Gang is based on a classic Swedish comic book by Chris Tengove. © Castell Media AB.



Last Girls' interesting graphics and style made a strong impression at the Forum. © 2002 Happy Life Animation AB.

like this could find a slot in their competitive schedules?

Lastly it seems vampires are in, in Europe. Two well known companies Hahn Film from Germany and France Animation from....you guessed it...France both brought projects featuring vampires. *Little Vampire*, 52 x 13' from France Animation was targeted slightly younger at a 6-9 years audience while Hahn Films' *School for Vampires*, 52 x 11', played older at 8-12 years. In the former, *Little Vampire* befriends an orphan Michael and

THE QUALITY OF PROJECTS HAS NOT INCREASED PROPORTIONATELY TO THE SUBMISSIONS.

finds a new friend as well as plenty of day light fun. While in the latter, Ollie the central character is a vampire who can't stand the sight of blood. More than a slight disadvantage in school where bloodsucking comes before ABC or 2 x 2 on the curriculum.

YEAH...BUT...

Looking back over the last thirteen years of Cartoon Forum, it is a real testament to the dedication and success of the organisers Marc Vandeweyer and Corrine Jenart that Cartoon has achieved such prominence in the annual calendar of animation and children's television events. The future challenge will be controlling the beast they have worked so hard to create! For all the increase in the number of projects being presented, said projects are chasing an ever-reducing amount of European broadcast Euros. Likewise the quality of projects has not increased proportionately to the submissions. Interestingly, and to this point rightly so, the organisers have not carried

out any creative selection of proposals. Moving forward one wonders if this is tenable. With such a large number of programmes to screen in three days, key players, broadcasters and investors need to feel they are going to find strong product. The fact that 82 new projects are presented is not now what we should be shouting about. It's about presenting stand out shows that broadcasters and investors will fight over; quality product that will play the world over. That's what will ensure Cartoon continues for another thirteen years. ■

JOHN BULLIVANT is the managing director of Kickback Media, a company he started this past fall. John says, "After nearly fifteen years of busting a gut for other people, it's wonderful just to be doing your own thing, your own way. The absolute best thing is, it doesn't matter if it doesn't work out — I just had to have a go!"



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SPANISH FESTIVAL

The 1st Tenerife International Animation Festival

by Bill Plympton

AS MY PLANE FROM MADRID CIRCLED OVER THE Tenerife Airport, my thoughts drifted to the massive death of almost 600 people, burnt to cinders. This is the spot where two 747 Jumbo Jets collided in 1977, causing the largest air fatality ever — I heard that one Dutch woman survived and went crazy later. But I wasn't here for my own amusement — I was here for the 1st Annual Tenerife International Animation Festival.

I was whisked from the airport to downtown Santa Cruz, to the Hotel Mencey, on the Rampla de Generalissimo Franco, one of the most beautiful hotels I've ever seen. There's caviar for breakfast, and the turtles there have their own swimming pool.

THERE IS NOTHING LIKE A SPANISH CINEMA AUDIENCE.

Jose Luis Feito, the festival director, has put together a wonderful program of shorts and features from all over the world, with a decided emphasis on Spanish and Latino films. In fact, I've never seen a program of so many Spanish feature films. One of the highlights was *El Bosque Animado*, or *The Living Forest*, a wonderful environmental story told in 3D computer animation.

The festival invited me to do a retrospective of my work, plus show my feature *Mutant Aliens*. The crowd filled the charming Deco cinema and was totally enthusiastic throughout the whole 3 hour program. Afterwards I was mobbed by fans. I tell you, there is nothing like a Spanish cinema audience.



Bill Plympton's most recent work *Mutant Aliens* was presented during a retrospective of his career. © Bill Plympton.

In between the films, I had time to explore this beautiful island, one of seven in the Canary Archipelago. We drove up to the volcano, El Teide (the highest in all of Spain), to find an exquisite plateau, unlike any scenery I've seen anywhere. Plus, the water was so clean and inviting, I had a problem attending all the great films.

Of course, the tourist industry is dominant but the people there want to put more emphasis on culture. In fact, they've just completed a magnificent new Arts Center, which will be the site of next year's festival.

I believe the first edition of the Tenerife International Animation Festival is off to a super start. And if you're looking for an animation festival with great audiences, great prize money and terrific food in a tropical paradise, this festival is for you. ■

BILL PLYMPTON is an award-winning independent animator based in New York. His recent feature film, *Mutant Aliens*, won the Annecy Grand Prix in 2001 and was released in theaters in 2002. His next feature, *Hair High*, is now in production and an "Ani-Cam" is Webcasting all of his drawing for the new film live at www.hairhigh.com. In addition, his Website can be seen in AWN's Animation Village at www.awn.com/plympton/.

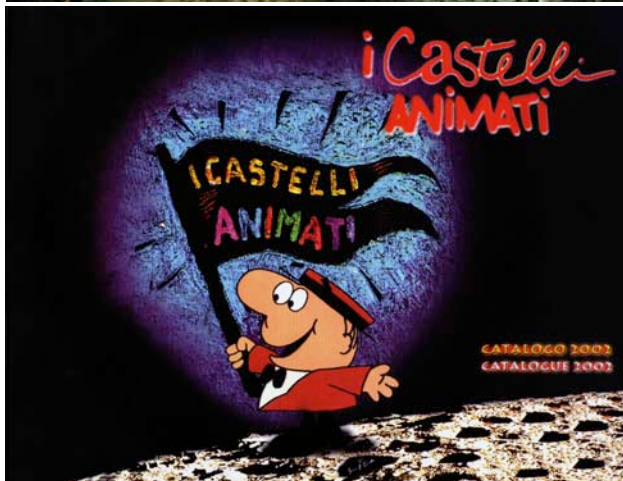
FESTIVAL ITALIA

My Trip to Italy's I Castelli

by Jon Hofferma



Nighttime at I Castelli Animatei. Courtesy of Katharina Frank.



THE SUN WAS JUST RISING OVER LEONARDO DA VINCI airport on Wednesday, October 23, when, jet-lagged but happy, I made a long-delayed return to the land of pasta, espresso and Bruno Bozzetto. I was met at the airport by the iridescent Cinzia Orizi, one of a group of young festival workers who've been coming to Genzano for many years and whose enthusiasm and camaraderie reflect the special spirit that infuses I Castelli Animatei. We were soon joined by the inimitable Dave Jones of Australia, a Web animator who was serving as one of the judges of the Web Competition, and the irrepressible [John R. Dilworth](#), creator of *Courage the Cowardly Dog*, ambassador of goodwill, and one of the animators whose work was being featured in this year's festival. With the intrepid Dino Orsolini at the wheel and a Beatles tape in the cassette player (inevitably evoking memories of Sir Paul's fabled appearance at the [2000 festival](#)), we made our way through narrow roads bordered by fields and grape arbors into the green hills south of Rome, to the picturesque town which has been home to I Castelli Animatei since its inception in 1996.

I CASTELLI ANIMATI LIVED UP TO ITS REPUTATION OF BEING ONE OF THE MOST WELCOMING AND FAMILIAL OF FESTIVALS.

THE FESTIVAL GETS UNDERWAY

The festival began that afternoon with a screening of Bozzetto's 1965 epic, *West and Soda*, an absurdist Western that amply displayed the prolific Italian director's characteristic quirky humor and frequently inspired set pieces. (It also pointed up what would be a pervasive problem for us unfortunate monolingualists [Old joke: What do you call someone who speaks two languages? Bilingual. What do you call someone who speaks three languages? Trilingual. What do you call someone who speaks one language? American] — the



Left to right (standing): Lily Snowden-Fine, Liz Fairs, Katherina Frank, Jimmy Picker, Alison Snowden, John R. Dilworth, Dave Jones, Normand Roger and Emilie Vergneau. Kneeling is Jon Hofferma and Arthur De Pins (right). Courtesy of David Fine.

film was in Italian with no subtitles or other translation. There were many occasions when a second, or third, or fourth language would have been helpful, but in general the messages managed to get through.)

Bozzetto, who arrived in human form on Friday and stayed for the remainder of the festival, was one of the animators being honored with retrospective screenings. The others, in addition to Dilworth, were veteran Polish director [Jerzy Kucia](#); New York clay-guy [Jimmy Picker](#), whose new film, *The Age of Ignorance* — a light-hearted romp through the annals of prehistoric sexual practice — was also in the International Competition; [David "Bob" Fine and Alison "Margaret" Snowden](#), whose sublime work helped provide the incisive and bittersweet humor



Robert Bradbrook's *Home Road* Movies won Best European Film. © Finetake/ Channel 4/ Ace 2001.

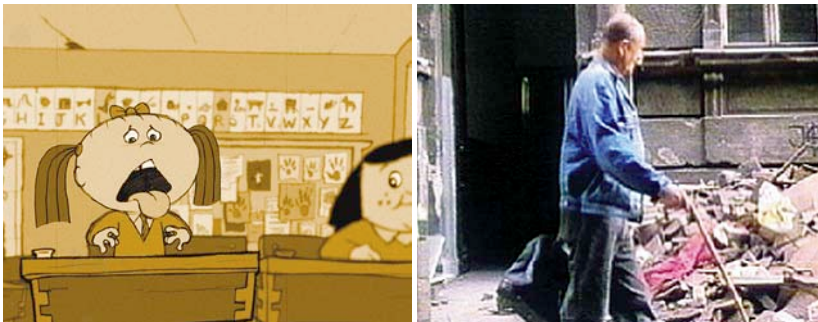
without which any festival is incomplete; and Canadian composer/arranger Normand Roger, who, one gradually came to realize, has had a hand in many of the most acclaimed animated films of the last twenty-five years, including works by [Frédéric Back](#), [Paul Driessen](#), [Caroline Leaf](#), Raimund Krumme and many others. Fine and Roger also served as jurors for the International Competition.

As a body of work, Kucia's films were the most consistently fascinating and challenging, sometimes frustratingly so. Literally dark and ambiguously suggestive, they ranged from the early *Powrot* (*The Return*, 1972) to *Strojenie instrumentowmy* (*Tuning Instruments*, 2000), which received a Special Jury Prize in the International Competition. Addressing the audience before a screening, Kucia said that, while he certainly didn't plan his trajectory in advance, he realizes in retrospect that he has been making one long film for thirty years. He feels that he's now reached the end of this phase and he speculated that his next film will be quite different — perhaps a comedy. (This was said jokingly, but it will be interesting to see what direction his work in fact takes.)

As has often been noted, I Castelli Animati is a much smaller festival than such institutions as Annecy and [Ottawa](#), but the intimate scale is in many ways an asset, fostering a familial atmosphere that, at least for me, added to the enjoyment. And, as always, there was plenty to see. In addition to the retrospectives mentioned above, the program included 36 films in the International Competition and 10 in the Italian Competition, as well as some 30 films screening out of competition in the showcase. There was also a selection of Web animation,

series, commercials, and the winners of a special competition conducted in conjunction with *Videotecnica* magazine. For anyone wishing to spend some time looking at non-moving images, there were two exhibitions, one featuring a prodigious collection of Bozzettiana, and the other displaying a selection of drawings used in the production of the animated feature, *Johan Padan a la scoperta de le americhe* (*Johan Padan and the Discovery of the Americas*), based on the play by Dario Fo.

The films are all screened in a single theater, the charming Cinema Modernissimo, with categories interspersed, rather than segregated, and the occasional panel discussion thrown in for good measure. The proceedings were moderated, as always, by the festival's artistic director, the indefatigable Luca Raffaelli, who was as enthusiastic introducing the last screening of the day at 11:30 p.m. as he had been at the first screening more than twelve hours before. When asked about his programming strategy, Luca explained that he remembered attending screenings in his youth where he would sit through 2 1/2 hours of cerebral Polish animation without a break. "The director made a short film — it wasn't meant to be seen [as one component in a homogeneous sequence]. It's important to mix things up, to have a balance between the crazy films and the serious ones."



See clips from Cathal Gaffney's *Give Up Yer Aul Sins* and *In Between* by Nicole Hewitt. Both screened at I Castelli this year. *Give Up Yer Aul Sins* © Brown Bag Films and *In Between* © Zagreb Films.

THE FRUITS OF THE JURY'S LABOR

Both crazy and serious films were represented in the prize-winners, although with a notable bias toward the latter. The Grand Prize in the International Competition went to Chris Hinton's *Flux* (Canada, 2002), a hand-drawn film that uses childlike images and an economy of means to explore family life and the inexorability of time. In addition to *Strojenie instrumentowmy* (see above), a Special Jury Prize was also awarded to *Phil Mulloy's The Invasion* (U.K., 2001), a dark and often very funny take on paranoia, religion and alien life-forms. *Biotope* (France, 2001)

by Merwan Chabane, one of the few films to employ a straightforward narrative style, received the award for Best First Film, while Robert Bradbrook's *Home Road Movies* (U.K., 2001), an affecting remembrance of the director's father and his family's road trips, was chosen as the Best European Film. The award for Best Nonnarrative Film went to the exquisite *Angela's Ashes: Typographic Experience* (U.K., 2001), by Damien Borowik, Sung Hoon Kang and Alexander Kokhwee Ng, in which text from Frank McCourt's bestselling novel takes on the characteristics of his inclement childhood. *Hidden* (Sweden, 2002), by David Aronowitsch, Hanna Heilborn and Mats Johansson, a film that uses a recorded interview with a twelve-year-old refugee to explore immigration issues, won the "Fabrizio Bellocchio" Prize for Social Content.



Relaxing in a town outside Genzano are: (left to right) Alison Snowden, Jimmy Picker, Liz Fairs, Dave Jones and David Fine. Snowden and Fine had their body of work presented at the festival. Courtesy of David Fine.

Joe Brumm's *Causes* (U.K., 2000), a provocative, if somewhat simplistic, look at the interconnected factors that create environmental crises, won the Audience Prize and received a Special Mention from the jury. Other Special Mentions were awarded to Marcel Hobi's *Geranium Peace* (Switzerland, 2001) — a personal favorite — in which people trade banalities as their world collapses around them; *La Funambula* (Italy, 2002) by Roberto Catani, "for its beautiful artistry;" the amusing *1300cc* (U.K., 2000) by Eoin Clarke, which was also an audience favorite; and Zoia Trofimova's *Le Trop Petit Prince* (France, 2001), cited by the jury as "a beautiful film for children."

In an informal interview the day after the awards ceremony, jury president David Fine recounted that it hadn't been easy to choose the winners in the various categories because the festival offered such a wide

diversity of high-quality films. "Each of the five jurors had their own favorites and so, rather than come to a unanimous decision about each prize, there was a general consensus about the group of films that deserved recognition generally." The general feeling among festival goers (based on a rigorously unscientific poll) was that the jury had done a fine job in adjudicating the winners.

In the Italian Competition, the jury awarded the Grand Prize to Liana Dognini's sensitive portrayal of felinicide, *Bye Bye* (U.K., 2001); a Special Jury Prize to *Chi si fa l'aspetti* (Italy, 2002), a 3D computer animation by students of the Istituto Europeo di Design; and a Special Mention to Marco Lucente's *Portali* (Italy, 2001), "for the commitment to the particular method used [traditional animation with integrated computer effects], which promises well for the future."



Left to right: animation expert and Italia ASIFA member Attilio Valenti, Web animation juror Joshua Held, animator Francesco Filippi, Anita and Irene Bozzetto, Roberto Frattini, Bruno Bozzetto and Normand Roger. Courtesy of David Fine.

Animated works created for the Web remain the somewhat suspect stepchild of the animation world, but the new form continues to improve and to gain legitimacy. The jury for the Web Competition, now in its third year, awarded the Best Series prize to *Banja* (France, 2002), a 3D Flash community adventure game by TeamcHmAn. The prize for Best Short went to the interactive comic strip, *Testimony: A Story Machine* (Australia, 2001) by Simon Norton, and David Berlioz's *Plok* (France, 2001) received a Special Mention.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

As is often the case these days, largely as a result of the accessibility and facility of digital tools, there were many imaginative and beautifully executed computer animations without a story line in sight. And, for many animators making narrative films,

coming up with an effective denouement remains a perennial problem. However, there were also a number of terrific films both in and out of competition



Banja won Best Series on the Web award. © TeamcHmAn 2001.

worth mentioning, including Michal Levy's *Giant Steps* (Israel, 2001), a 3D visualization of John Coltrane's seminal composition; Nicole Hewitt's *In Between* (Croatia, 2002), a study of the trash of Zagreb that suggested a collaboration between Norman McLaren and Jean-Luc Godard; Cathal Gaffney's *Give Up Yer Aul Sins* (Ireland, 2001), in which a child's version of a Bible story is given literal form; *Reveils* (France, 2001)

"IT'S IMPORTANT TO MIX THINGS UP, TO HAVE A BALANCE BETWEEN THE CRAZY FILMS AND THE SERIOUS ONES." — LUCA RAFFAELLI

by Julien Duchet, Patricia Magniez and Sébastien Wibaut, which, while a little hokey narratively, displayed a striking visual style; and *Leunig — How Democracy Actually Works* (Australia, 2001) by Andrew Horne — Your vote does matter. Also, John Dilworth's *The Dirty Birdy* (1994) is definitely a classic of some kind, although I'd hate to have to defend this position to anyone over the age of four.

Other festival highlights (what makes I Castelli Animati I Castelli Animati) included:

Luca Raffaelli's spot-on impersonation of the aforementioned Dilworth when the intractable animator didn't show for a screening.

The rendering of the festival logo in flowers on the streets of Genzano, while a brass band played marches by John Philip Sousa.



Bruno Bozzetto (right) and conductor Roberto Frattini dine with Bozzetto's daughters, Irene (left) and Anita. Courtesy of David Fine.

The sometimes disruptive, but generally endearing, presence of children during many screenings. Arrangements were made for groups of local schoolchildren to attend particular shows, where they would fill half the theater. As one of the organizers explained, it was important to expose them to something other than normal TV fare, and to

inspire the next generation of animation enthusiasts.

A special screening (not attended by children) of *Buried Treasure* (1928), billed as the first pornographic cartoon.

As mentioned above, I Castelli Animati lived up to its reputation of being one of the most welcoming and familial of festivals. The good vibe seemingly was embodied by everyone on the hard-working staff, from artistic director Raffaelli to director of festival organization Emanuela Marrocco, organizers Sabrina Perucca and Anna Castellani, the unfailingly gracious guest-minder, Liz Fairs, and (Special Mention) the inestimable Gang of Six: Elisa Baldazzi, Max Ciotola, Gloria Ducci, Grazia Lerosé and Cinzia & Nicola Orizi. ■

JON HOFFERMAN, an independent filmmaker, writer and graphic designer, frequently reviews films for *Fresh from the Festivals*. He is also the creator of the *Classical Composers Poster* (a unique work of art that makes a wonderful gift for anyone interested in or learning about classical music, available at www.carissimi.com) and a shameless promoter.

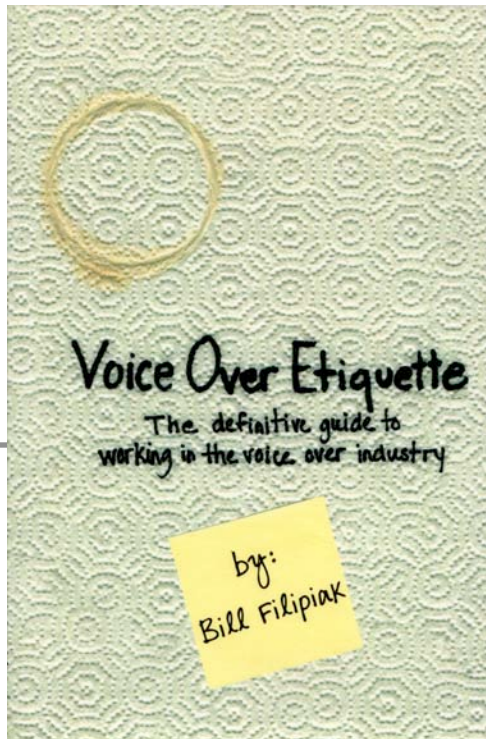
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Voice Over Etiquette

— The Book

BOOK REVIEW

by Will Ryan

THIS MAY VERY WELL SERVE AS AN INITIAL
ROUGH GUIDE TO THE BASICS OF THE
CONTEMPORARY SCENE...

“ETIQUETTE?”

Well, okay. Never quite thought of it that way before. The word conjures up a whiff of elevated pinkies and antimacassars perhaps, but it does create a concise and arresting title. Points for that. One presupposes Rule Number One might be, “Don’t be late for the session,” and somewhere about midway through this 118 page trade paperback one’s suspicions are finally confirmed. This is not an illogical delay, as it turns out, because the various tips and dicta presented herein roll out in a chronological “here’s how you get started” approach, through such chapter monikers as “The Demo Reel,” “Distributing the Demo Reel,” “The Audition” and so on.

AN INTRODUCTION

Chapter one is entitled “The Industry.” As in “the voice over industry” cited in the book’s subtitle. “Industry?” one may ask oneself. Is the craft referred to actually a hitherto previously unsuspected mighty aggregate? “Business,” maybe. “Racket,” perhaps. But “Industry”? As the now-anticipated chapter proceeds, the author, alas, shies away from making the daring case that the voice-over game is anything

more vital or enterprising than a relatively minor branch of the larger, more glamorous entertainment industry. Nor does he in the ensuing pages ever attempt to elevate the trade anywhere north of its position as one of the potentially-profitable-for-some-of-its-perpetrators props helping to hold up the dodgy business of advertising.

A more appropriate (to use a term borrowed from the Land of Etiquette) title to this first chapter would be “An Introduction to This Book,” for that is what it is. The author’s actual goal, as it turns out, is not to provide “the definitive guide to working in the voice over industry” as some misguided naif might presume from the subtitle displayed on the cover. Instead we are presented with a more accurate summation of the true aim of this slim but breezy tome: to produce a narrative of “fairly off the cuff” observations “directed toward those interested in becoming voice over talent.” The vague and impersonal term “hopefully” is misemployed four or five times in the first two chapters in discussing various other authorial aspirations. Things finally seem to get started in chapter three, which, as it turns out, is entitled “Getting Started.”

THE BOTTOM LINE

From then on the book succeeds pretty much on its own terms. For a novice, a non-actor, someone not active in any part of the show business, this may very well serve as an initial rough guide to the basics of the contemporary scene, at least as it appears from the perspective of Tennessee. For that is, in fact, where our author, an actor-director-engineer-producer and former Los Angeleno, is currently situated. Okay, that's not in the thick of things, but let's face it: The basics of the game aren't all that different across the continents or across the decades. A lot of advice on etiquette is simply codified common sense; "Much of what is expressed and suggested holds true for just about any profession," he forewarns us in the chapter entitled "The Industry."

A smattering of quotes from actors (and the stray agent and casting director) pepper the text rather sparsely. Four or five quotations are inexplicably recycled, sometimes within the space of a few pages. A good copy editor might have made this volume a much more enjoyable "read," to use a favourite term of the author's. And this is where the publisher lets the author — and us — down. For, on the one hand, we are presented with a fairly chummy and agreeable

host who's on our side. He really does want to help us out, de-mystify this nook of the ad biz and show us how it's all done. On the other hand, we are bedeviled at every turn by dubious punctuation choices and by that vile spawn of the age of "spell-check:" homophonic substitution.

If you think you might enjoy a friendly guide to the voice-over world in general (animation is little remarked upon as a specific sub-division, advertising properly being treated as the norm for this occupation) and you aren't offput by the use of "it's" for "its," "there" for "their," "wrap" for "rap," "who's" for "whose" or "conceded" for "conceited," then run out and buy (or, if you prefer, "by") this book. ■

Voice Over Etiquette — The definitive guide to working in the voice over industry by *Bill Filipiak*. Brentwood, Tennessee: *Three F Publishing*, 2002. 118 pages. ISBN: 0-9723532-0-8 (US\$14.95)

WILL RYAN, who usually records in Los Angeles, New York and London, once recorded an album in Tennessee featuring Clarence "Ducky" Nash. Everyone was on time.

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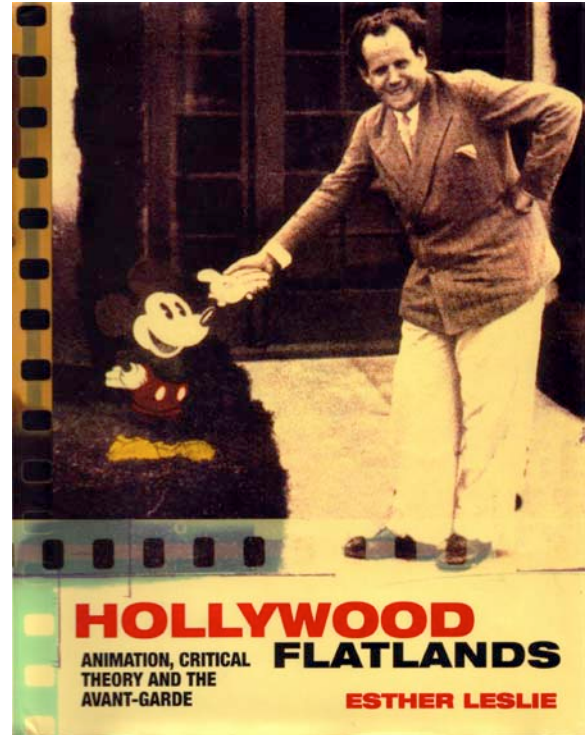
BOOK REVIEW

Hollywood Flatlands:

Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde

by Giannalberto Bendazzi

IN THIS INCISIVE AND PROFOUND STUDY, WHICH AT THE SAME TIME IS AN INTELLECTUAL NOVEL, YOU FIND SUCH CLASSIC SUBJECTS AS ADOLPH HITLER, CHARLIE CHAPLIN, LEON TROTSKY, MICKEY MOUSE... THEODOR W. ADORNO, SERGEI M. EISENSTEIN...THE CLASS STRUGGLE...



W

E, THE INHABITANTS OF ANIMATIONLAND, ARE OFTEN GUILTY OF happy seclusion. We have our festivals, our Academy Awards, our masters, our history and our books about it. Only sometimes do we dare to look outside of the walls of our own culture. But there is society, politics, science, music, art and philosophy out there; they actually interact with us and we do so with them. This is the reason why I warmly, heartily recommend everybody read this book by Esther Leslie, a lecturer in English and Humanities at Birkbeck College in London, Great Britain. It is a large, open window through which we can see the landscape that surrounded our founding fathers in the first half of the 20th century.

A FASCINATING APPROACH

Hollywood Flatlands is not a coffee-table book and you must have a helluva good grounding in history and many more branches of learning to savour it fully. But Leslie's approach is refreshing and exciting, as she tells us how some of the 20th century's greatest avant-garde artists, thinkers and film-makers (more exactly, the pre-Cold War artists, thinkers and film-makers) reacted to Hollywood animated cartoons.

Suspicion: isn't this an elitist and cold subject? Maybe. But a) the book is full of surprises, and b) Leslie's prose is as captivating as a storyteller's.

In this incisive and profound study, which at the same time is an intellectual novel, you find such classic subjects as Adolph Hitler, Charlie Chaplin, Leon Trotsky, Mickey Mouse, Nazism, Leni Riefenstahl, Theodor W. Adorno, Sergei M. Eisenstein, Dumbo, Betty Boop, the Class Struggle, Piet Mondrian, Walter Benjamin and Walt Disney (along with much, much more).

The author is an unparalleled researcher and is capable of sharp insights; especially about German avant-garde, philosophers Horkheimer and Adorno's approach to animated cartoons, the love/hate affair between the Nazis, Disney's output and Walt Disney himself, and the reaction Adorno had toward *Fantasia*.

In a couple of sentences, Leslie writes a full essay about two decades of German documentary: "[By the mid-Thirties, Leni] Riefenstahl was pirouetting on the grave of avant-garde. Her mission, from *Triumph of the Will* (1934) onwards, was to prune documentary of its experimentalist, Weimar-Jewish connotations. (...) In 1934 Walter Ruttmann did film a frame story for Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, and he directed a number of studio scenes. From a left-modernist perspective, this collaboration marks the collapse of the avant-garde in Germany." Another example: "(Sergei) Eisenstein took Disney extremely seriously. He was aware that his own mode of film-making was not so removed from Disney's mode, even if it might seem to some a world apart. Both used storyboards, for example." (I'd like to add a personal anecdote here: since my adolescence I have been fascinated by a short sequence in Eisenstein's masterpiece *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), where he symbolizes that the Odessa people strike back at the policemen's repression with the quick editing of three close-ups of marble lions in different successive positions — relaxed, reacting, attacking. And this is, in its own way, animation.)

WAIT A MINUTE...

If you feel I'm serenading this book too much, hold on. I must add that there is one thing in it I frankly find surprising and odd. It is no less than its main thesis, as stated by Esther Leslie in her introduction

("Prelude").

She writes: "A generally accepted line declares over and over that high culture and popular culture have been — for so long — enemies." (...) "Postmodern orthodoxy claims that 'intellectual' interest in popular culture comes into being in the post-war period (after years of modernist elitism), with the inauguration of postmodernism's own discourses." (...) Therefore "this study was motivated by frustration at the phoney war between high culture and popular or low or mass culture." (...) Because "modernist theorists and artists were fascinated by cartoons. And those who took cartoons most seriously were political revolutionaries."

Now, in 35 years as a film and animation critic and historian, I never met a serious person who truly believed that high culture and popular culture have been — for so long — enemies. I'm not an expert of postmodern orthodoxy, but if it is based on the grounds that "intellectual" interest in popular culture came into being in the post-war period, well, this is simply a false base; it certainly blossomed in the post-war period, but had always existed and most inhabitants of Animationland have always known it.

In other words, I'm happy that Leslie got so frustrated as to feel the urge to write this masterful book, but I don't share the same starting point. Although, since there aren't any reasons at all for mistrusting her good faith, I have another frustration. There must be many people around that actually have said or written those things at which she got angry. God save us from them! ■

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