

# AW

**ANIMATION WORLD MAGAZINE**

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## *TOMORROW'S TECHNOLOGY*



THE  
**ANIMATRIX**

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BY JON HOFFERMAN



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HYPER TRILOGY

# The Two Towers: Built on Weta's Precious Mettle

by Greg Singer

**W**ETA, LTD. OF NEW ZEALAND HAS BEEN of New Zealand has been pulling every trick out of its bag in bringing to the screen the mythopoetic struggle of good versus evil in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Given the 900-plus shots composited for *The Two Towers*, the second film of the epic, one would get the impression that the folks of Weta haven't been getting much sleep during these last few years. However, the eleventh-hour accomplishment of animators and artisans has not gone unappreciated. Last year, Weta took home Oscar honors for achievements in cinematography, makeup, and visual effects. For this year's film, among other accolades, the character of Gollum/Smeagol has already won an award from the Broadcast Film Critics Association for "Best Digital Acting Performance;" and BAFTA, the British equivalent of the U.S. Academy Awards, recognized *The Two Towers* as the public's choice for "Film of the Year."

Nonetheless, for those four or five readers who may not have delved into the original Tolkien books, we should know by the end of the year how it all turns out. There are many battles yet to be waged in Middle Earth.

## EVIL THAT DOES NOT SLEEP

About 30 to 40 animators had worked on *The Two Towers*, more than double from the first film. Many of the animators worked on the wargs (the vicious, furred creatures that the Orcs rode into battle) and the fell beasts (the serpentine, bat-like creatures that the Ringwraiths rode in hunting for the Ring throughout the countryside). More than half of the animators worked on Gollum, the former hobbit-like being whose mad devotion to the "precious" Ring is much of the driving force of the film.



In *The Two Towers*' world of gloom, the Weta animation team shines. All images © 2002 New Line Productions. All rights reserved.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS  
THE TWO TOWERS



The Nazgûl's steeds (or fell beasts) help in the tireless hunt for the Ring.

All of the creatures for the story — including the Troll, Balrog, mumakils and oliphaunts, and the charmingly ancient Treebeard — began as design maquettes, before being rendered as digital models. The models were then fitted with a skeleton, a muscle rig was built around the skeleton to drive the flesh, and then the characters were given texturing and lighting for the final scene.

Eric Saindon served as a creature supervisor for *The Two Towers*, mostly working to set up the muscle, skinning and hair on Gollum. Saindon comments, "Our muscle and skinning system [at Weta], the way the muscles flex and keep their volume, the way the skin actually moves on top of the surface, is a little unique compared to most of the other systems I have seen." The muscle code for the creatures was written entirely in-house as a plug-in for Maya.

Saindon recalls how Gollum, who appeared in *The Fellowship of the Ring* as little more than skin on bone, had to be redesigned for *The Two Towers*: "It was a bit of a daunting task to make Gollum look real. In the first film, we faked it quite a bit to get through the two or three shots we had. You hardly had to see him. But we



Eric Saindon, CG creature supervisor for *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

really couldn't do that in the second film."

Originally from Maine, USA, Saindon studied architecture in Washington state, before later moving down to California to work on environments and spaceships for the feature film *Star Trek: Insurrection*. Moving from his role as technical director into animation set-up, he eventually found himself working on the fantastical creatures of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Among his other duties, Saindon also helped to establish the pipeline for bringing motion-capture data from the actors' movements onto the digital puppets. Nuance, created by Giant Studios, is the modification software that Weta used for *The Two Towers* in

## JACKSON COACHED A HALF-TIME STADIUM CROWD TO HELP IN ACHIEVING THE SOUNDS FOR THE ARMIES OF DARKNESS



A concept painting for Helm's Deep (above), and the composited scene using Nothing Real's Shake and Weta's proprietary Massive software.



editing their motion-capture data. With this foundation, animators would then change, edit or in some cases completely redo a character's performance.

"We didn't use mocap data on all the shots," Saindon explains, "and for those that we did, typically, we didn't use straight mocap data." Prior to skinning and texturing, he says, "Our motion edit group took the data, cleaned it up, got rid of the pops and slips and other artifacts of the process... That information was put on an IK puppet, and then the animators changed the performance to work better in the environment of the scene...or sometimes they

would delete entire chunks of the data and re-animate it from scratch."

### MASSIVE UNDERTAKING

In creating such huge battle sequences as the attack on Helm's Deep, Peter Jackson coached a half-time stadium crowd to help in achieving the sounds for the armies of darkness, while Weta's proprietary behavioral software, dubbed Massive, pioneered the digital side of things. The Massive technology was also employed in creating scenes with oliphaunts and mumakils — the gargantuan,

ALL OF THE CREATURES FOR THE STORY BEGAN AS DESIGN MAQUETTES, BEFORE BEING RENDERED AS DIGITAL MODELS.

Sauron's armies of darkness ride to battle on the towering backs of oliphaunts.



elephantine creatures on whose backs the invading hordes were ferried to war.

With towers on the backs of the oliphaunts, Saindon says, "All the soldiers are positioned there using Massive. We tell it how many guys we want on top, and the rough positioning, and Massive fills it up. The technical director sets what motions the guys have to choose from. They'll have particular motions that they have the option to do. Some guys might be shooting bows and arrows, some might just be walking around. We don't have to decide what each character is going to do, but we can give them a library of motions, and when Massive runs, they go through it themselves and figure it out."

The oliphaunts will be in a considerable number of shots for the final film, and so the Weta team will have to give the characters more of their attention. Saindon continues, "For [*The Two Towers*], we tried to do a Massive simulation of the guys on top, and found that the slightest little step from the oliphaunt would set the tower in motion in such a way that everyone would just instantly fall off. So, whereas before the

oliphaunts weren't in enough shots to make it that difficult yet, that's something we need to work on for the third film quite a bit — to make such a huge creature walk in such a way that guys could actually ride on top of it, and not go flying."

One imagines, when simulating scenes using Massive, several "takes" can be made until the kind of behavior results that works best for the shot. "For the large battle sequences," Saindon says, "we would run simulations overnight, and come in the mornings to see what the characters had done. Sometimes, we would find they did something completely out of the ordinary, or that we wouldn't expect at all. During the early sims, once the battle started, like 30-40% of the guys would all run away. They just didn't want to fight. So, we had to make them much 'braver,' so they'd be willing to stay and fight."

The third film entails enormous battle scenes, with hundreds of thousands of soldiers. It would be comical, perhaps, to keep some of the simulations as outtakes for the DVD release of the film. Saindon says, "I'm sure we will come up with some very interesting sims."



Treebeard as an animatronic puppet (top), with Merry and Pippin in his arms; as a digital model (center); and as his final rendered self (bottom).

### OUT OF THE PAST, INTO THE FUTURE

The ents, the ancient race of walking, talking trees, were among the other big characters in the film. Entirely keyframed, the ents brought an interesting “choppy” aesthetic to the otherwise fluid-looking 3D work.

Saindon says, “We created a full-size animatronic puppet of Treebeard’s upper torso that the actors sat on, and it was very stop-motionesque. Peter [Jackson] liked the way it moved, but it just didn’t feel real. The eyes didn’t have the depth that Peter wanted in them.”

Drawing inspiration from such stop-motion masters as Ray Harryhausen, animation director Randall Cook also liked the rigid movement of the animatronic puppet. He decided to keep the look and feel for the digital character, and Jackson completely agreed. Saindon says, “Even his skin and facial features, the way his bark slid on the surface, was very chunky.”

**I WAS OBSESSED WITH GOLLUM AS A CHILD.**  
— BAY RAITT

Bay Raitt, who worked on the facial system for the hero creatures of the films, recalls, “[Creature technical director] Sven Jensen built controls for Treebeard such that you could control how jerky the bark on his face would move around. Even if you were moving his cheeks in a relaxed fashion, you could adjust how jerky the little pieces of bark would clunk around on his face. The idea was that he was supposed to be a really old tree, and to have him moving with a little difficulty. Steven Hornby was the lead animator on Treebeard, and he sort of ‘nailed’ that abrupt movement.”

In distinguishing between keyframing and performance-based animation, Raitt observes: “When you do motion-capture, it looks realistic and it’s dramatically relevant, but sometimes it lacks dramatic energy. When you do [straight] animation, it usually has a lot of dramatic energy and it’s dramatically relevant, but it lacks realism. I think really solid animation, or really solid motion-capture, is when you get all three: when it’s relevant to the scene, it has dramatic energy, and it looks realistic.”

Raitt continues, “If you do have to error on one side or the other, it’s sort of a subjective choice whether on the side of ‘does it look realistic,’ or ‘does it have the energy’...I know that Peter and Randy seem like they both appreciate energy more than realism. So, when you look at the Cave Troll, Balrog, Treebeard or Gollum, to some extent, there are moments where the

IT LOOKS LIKE THE THIRD MOVIE IS GOING TO LIVE UP TO EXPECTATIONS OF BEING BIGGER, BADDER, LOUDER...JUST EVERYTHING.

— BAY RAITT

energy comes through loud and clear, sometimes at the expense of the realism. From my experience, that subtle piece will play well through time. The technology will continue to get better and better, and things will become more realistic, but the dramatic energy that each of the characters has in the scene is pretty timeless. Like the old stop-motion films, *King Kong* or *Mighty Joe Young*, they have that energy, so even though it might not look completely realistic, it has this attitude to it. I think that's what Randy has in spades, and it comes through in his direction and the work he does, and what he demands out of all of us."

In the third and final film of the trilogy, *The Return of the King*, we can look forward to new characters such as Shelob, the giant evil spideress. Rumor has it that Peter Jackson is a bit of an arachnophobe — so hopefully the creepiness and scariness of the character will translate well to the screen for audiences to share.

Raitt says, "It looks like the third movie is going to live up to expectations of being bigger, badder, louder...just ev-

erything. It's going to be intense. The spirit in which *The Lord of the Rings* is being made...everyone working on the film is a fan of the books. I came down here to work on the film, because my mom read me *The Lord of the Rings* as a little kid, and I was obsessed with Gollum as a child. There's quite a few of us that fit into that camp. These are sort of the unmakeable movies, and we're all pouring our blood, sweat and tears into making them, working into the wee hours, because we want them to be cool." ■

**GREG SINGER** is an animation welfare advocate, eating in Los Angeles.

Note: Readers may contact any *Animation World Magazine* contributor by sending an e-mail to [editor@awn.com](mailto:editor@awn.com).

## 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:

### CONCEPT TO CREATION

Mark Simon begins his series of twelve excerpts from his new book *Producing Independent 2D Character Animation: Making and Selling a Short Film*, with some helpful tricks of the trade.

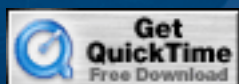
### FRESH FROM THE FESTIVALS: MARCH 2003'S FILM REVIEWS

Jon Hofferma reviews five short films fresh from the festival circuit: *The Affectionate Punch* by Thor Adam Goodall, *Les Chasseurs de Poissons (The Fish Hunters)* by Rosana Liera, *The Dark Side of the Morning* by Erik Rosenlund, *Dog* by Suzie Templeton, and *From the 104th Floor* by Serguei Bassine.

### OSCAR NOM LEADS TO SUCCESS FOR BROWN BAG

An Oscar nomination has indeed transferred into real business for Ireland's Darragh O'Connell and Cathal Gaffney of Brown Bag Films. *Give Up Yer Aul Sins* came out of nowhere it seemed to capture the Academy's heart last year...by this year it has transformed itself into a phenomena.

View the QuickTime clips online!



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ANIMATION WORLD MAGAZINE



TECH TRIUMPH

# The Two Towers: Face to Face with Gollum

*by Greg Singer*

IN [THE TWO TOWERS](#), A FAVORITE SCENE OF AUDIENCES was the schizophrenic argument of the submissive, frightened Smeagol with his belligerently self-protective alter-ego Gollum. With the two personalities cleverly juxtaposed, we see in a moment the wonderful, expressive range of actor Andy Serkis and the team of [Weta](#) artists who successfully brought the performance to life.

Gollum is, without question, one of the highlights of *The Two Towers*, and considered to be among the best performances of the film. It is no mean feat for one character to



Andy Serkis provided the voice and acting for Gollum, which the animators used as a foundation in delivering the character's final performance. All images © 2002 New Line Productions. All rights reserved.

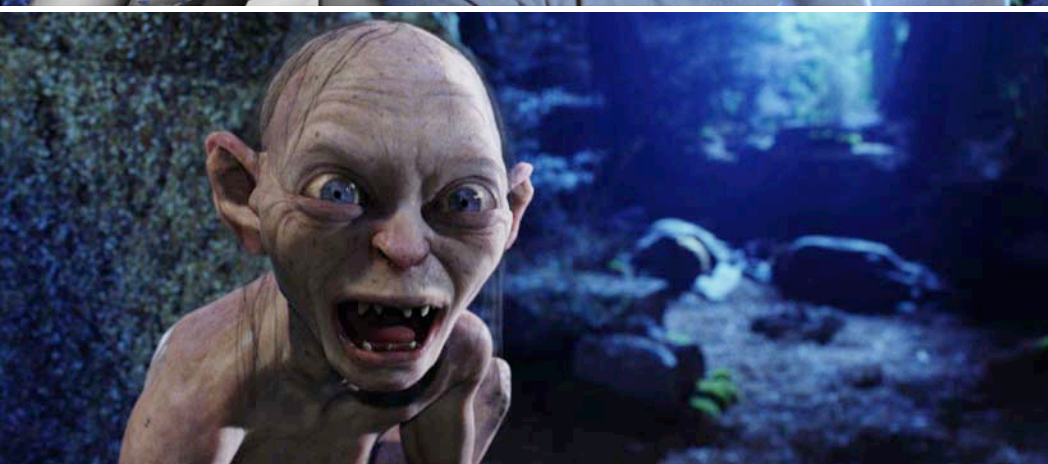
arouse so much contempt and pity. Yet we hold our sympathy for Gollum somewhat at arm's length; it is a hesitant trust. We want to like him, but don't know quite what to make of him.

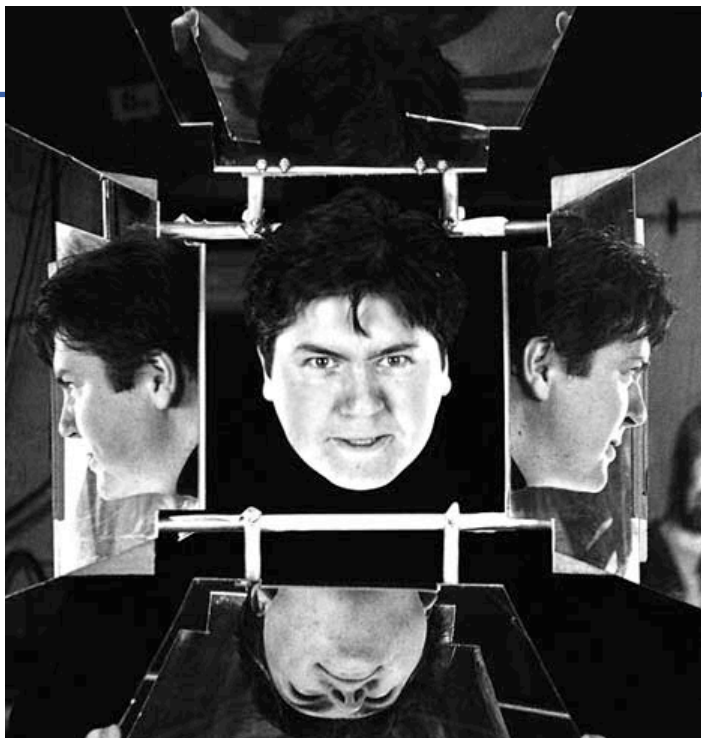
### A HOST OF PEOPLE AND TECHNIQUES

With the motion and voice originally supplied by Serkis, the final on-screen presence was crafted and honed by a team of 18 animators. Bay Raitt, the creature facial lead for the movie, likes to use the following analogy: "Andy Serkis wrote the music, then [animation director] Randy Cook conducted it, and the animators are the ones playing the music that you see in the film."

Gollum was created through a combination of techniques. To begin, Serkis would be on set, shooting Gollum's scenes with the live actors. Serkis' movements would be match-moved as a rough performance onto a digital puppet for the animators to use, so they could begin blocking in the face and the beats. Then, Peter Jackson would decide that the performance could be pushed a little more, and Serkis would come in again to do his scenes on a motion-capture set.

Motion-capture data oftentimes has all sorts of problems, because it doesn't capture faces, hands or feet very well. So, before the data would get to the animators, the motion editing department would fix the feet and hands, and all of the pops and jitters. Then, given video reference, the animators would start animating the fingers and hands, the feet and face, on top of the motion-capture. Sometimes, in this process, new dialogue for Gollum would come up, and the animators would start over again. In sections, they would get direction from Jackson that certain aspects of the perfor-





Bay Raitt, creature facial lead for *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

mance look good, while other aspects could be completely reinvented. For example, instead of Gollum looking scared in one moment, perhaps he would be called upon to look tough. The animator would then take a section of the animation, delete Serkis' performance, and re-keyframe it. This could be for certain body parts, or just the head and neck, or the whole character. Raitt explains, "So, when you watch the actual sequence, it's not motion-capture, it's not motion editing, it's not keyframing, it's not rotoscoping... It's a mishmash of all of the above."

A lot of congratulations are rightfully showered upon Andy Serkis. Serkis was as involved as any of the artists in breathing life into Gollum's character. When requested, he would even come to the animators' desks to act out a scene for them, so the animators could make their own video reference of his performance.

Raitt comments, "Andy definitely deserves the applause, as do the animators. They took the data as a starting point, embellished it, sweetened it, and made sure the intent of the performance was really clear. Sometimes the footage was so blurry or bad, or the direction had changed, that it was entirely keyframing. It is important to note that there is no facial motion-capture data, at all, on Gollum. The only motion-capture data is for his torso, legs and arms."

For Gollum's range of expressions, Raitt and his team created a system of sculpted faces for the ani-

IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THERE IS NO FACIAL MOTION-CAPTURE DATA, AT ALL, ON GOLLUM.

— BAY RAITT

mators to use. The animators would, almost like playing a musical instrument, use the facial system to bring Gollum's emotional world into being. Among the lead animators for Gollum were Adam Valdez, Atsushi Sato and Mike Stevens. While the animators definitely took a lead from Serkis, from an acting and presence point of view, as Raitt explains, "At the end of the day the animators were responsible for delivering the shot as a final piece of performance."



Weta Digital's Gollum facial team (right to left): Jamie Beswarick, Bay Raitt, John Feather, Brad deCausin and (not pictured) Sven Jensen.

### FACING THE MUSIC

What exactly does the job of a "creature facial lead" entail? Raitt was responsible for delivering to animators a facial puppet that they could animate, and that would show up as a reasonable approximation of what they would eventually see on screen. Raitt and his team, along with the creature department, were responsible for delivering, as he says, "Gollum from the neck up."

Raitt explains, "Gollum's head began as a cube on



The on-set performance of Andy Serkis (top), and the animated digital performance of Gollum (bottom).

my screen. Using scan data I got from the [Weta] Workshop, and working back and forth with the animators and Randy Cook and Peter Jackson, I modeled his face, laid out the UV's [texture setup], and then delivered that puppet to the animators so they could get their shots done and out the door." Minus the textures and shading, Raitt sculpted the 875 combination shapes that are present in the articulated face of Gollum for the final film. "I've basically been staring at Andy Serkis and Gollum for the better part of three-and-a-half years," Raitt says.

Originally from northern California, Raitt did not go to university, but rather started working for Image, coloring comics and doing "the occasional back pin-

THE ORIGINAL DESIGN DIDN'T WORK, PER SE, BECAUSE IT WAS A LITTLE MORE CREATURE-ORIENTED.

— BAY RAITT

up" for some of the early issues of *Spawn*, *The Pitt*, *The Maxx* and *Akira*. Moving his way south to San Francisco, Raitt then took up residence at Protozoa, doing digital puppetry and performance animation for video games and television. Eventually, he moved down to Los Angeles to help as a product manager for a 3D software system called Mirai — created, at the time, by Nichimen Graphics, but which has since gone into the hands of a company called Izware. From there, Raitt moved on to Weta, Ltd. in New Zealand to work on *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. "It's kind of an odd career path," he summarizes.

When he arrived at Weta, Raitt was charged with designing and building the system they would use to sculpt the faces of the trilogy's hero creatures, including the Balrog, Cave Troll and Treebeard. After surveying what tools were available, and doing some prototypes, Raitt decided the best way to define the characters would be to sculpt combination shapes for their expressions. Mirai, a 3D sculpting engine that has been around for about 17 years, was the tool of choice.

Animator Jason Schleifer, who used to work at Alias|Wavefront, came on board the Weta team at about the same time as Raitt, and the two of them served as the essential support team in building the digital puppets for Gollum. While Raitt concentrated on modeling and sculpting Gollum's head, Schleifer built the puppet and rigs that control Gollum's body.

IF WE SCREWED UP GOLLUM'S SMILE, THE WHOLE FELLOWSHIP, THE WHOLE MOVIE, WOULDN'T REALLY MAKE SENSE TO ME.

—BAY RAITT

Raitt and Schleifer wrote the code that brings together the individual digital models. When saved out to a directory, the system automatically compiles the models, so that the sculptures can be moved around with a set of sliders to see how they work together. Raitt says, "Though Mirai has a little better tool set for sculpting, the animators can interact with, and manipulate, the puppets in Maya."

In traditional animation, of course, the lead animator lays down the keys and the assistant animator creates the inbetweens. What Raitt has accomplished with his combination sculpting, essentially, is to lay out the "keyframes" for Gollum's face. The difference, however, is that instead of creating keyframes that are laid out sequentially in time, the combination sculptures are keyframes that have to look good shuffled in any order, and from every angle.

In the three years he has been working on *The Lord of the Rings*, Raitt has sculpted over 10,000 shapes, or facial poses. He explains, "This is what Gollum looks like when he's frowning. This is what he looks like when his eyebrows are up. But this is what he looks like when his eyebrows are up and he's frowning." Using a set of 64 controls, in combination with one another — with names like "Lip Up Raiser," "Lip Low Depressor," "Brow In Raiser," "Brow Out Raiser," "Nose Wrinkle," etc. — the animator has control of moving among the sculpted shapes to craft a character's performance.

While Raitt worked mostly on sculpting Gollum's facial expression range, the same system and methodology was used by creature technical directors John Feather, Sven Jensen and Brad deCaussin to create the other characters such as Treebeard. While the design for Gollum was being approved for the *The Two Towers*, Raitt was looking throughout the industry for people who could help build the characters as quickly and expertly as possible. Raitt remembers, "I grabbed these guys because they were really good digital sculptors, they knew Mirai, and because I could sit down with them, during training, and pour into their capable hands the two years worth of experience I had with Gollum."

Creating a host of shapes that can all play together nicely, under the control of the animators, is a kind of artform which Raitt refers to simply as "combination sculpting." While Raitt himself created roughly 75-80% of Gollum's face, he would assign to

his team other sections of the face to sculpt. "For example," Raitt says, "when Gollum sputters his lips, blowing air out of his cheeks, those are Brad's shapes. Gollum also has all of this beautiful, sexy stuff that happens with his skull and the back of his jaw when he opens his mouth, or when he says, 'Oooh' — John Feather sculpted a bunch of those shapes. And when Gollum sort of squints his eyes, and his lips stick together, Sven sculpted those." All of the facial models filtered through Raitt, and he massaged the sculptures into the larger shape network. The team had to sculpt as fast as they could, even up to the end of production. Raitt says, "Almost three weeks before the last shot was finalized, I was still compiling new faces for animators for specific shots."

#### BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

Following *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Peter Jackson decided the original design for Gollum didn't work as well as he wanted, in lining him up next to Sam (Sean Astin) and Frodo (Elijah Wood). Once Andy Serkis was cast to play the part of Gollum, Jackson even considered for a time putting Serkis directly in the film.

Raitt explains, "The original design didn't work, per se, because it was a little more creature-oriented." Mike Asquith, who had sculpted the design maquette of Gollum for the first film, had done "a lot of beautiful stuff with skin, just hanging right over the bone, without any muscle," Raitt says. "But when I tried pulling that around [digitally], it became a little bit difficult, because it looked like the skin was moving for no reason at all."

At the time Asquith had sculpted the original Gollum, Andy Serkis hadn't been cast yet. Raitt continues, "Mike did some initial character studies, which helped to define a lot of the feel for Gollum — these small head busts, just some beautiful stuff. They don't look exactly like Gollum does in the movie, but, from a sculpting pass, they were the original inspiration. We were like, 'That's it. That's what we want.'"

When Serkis was cast, it was fortuitous because, as Raitt says, "He really looks like this design maquette...though we knew we could probably make it look even more so. When Andy first saw it, he said, 'Christ, that looks like my dad.'"

The idea for the redesign stemmed from a drawing by Christian Rivers. He took a snapshot of the Gollum model from the first film, a photograph of Andy



Gollum's eyes reveal the level of detail and care in crafting his character.

Serkis, and drew a sketch mixing elements of the two. From that single sketch, Peter Jackson realized they could tune the original Gollum to look more like Serkis, and so they decided to go ahead with a redesign.

Starting from scratch, Peter Jackson, Richard Taylor, Christian Rivers, Alan Lee and Jamie Beswarick all helped in the intense design phase to re-imagine Gollum.

Raitt says, "Jamie is one of the mad geniuses at Weta, who physically sculpted the Cave Troll and the Nazgul's steeds, Gollum's body and face, and the Orcs. He's the best sculptor on earth in my opinion."

Raitt and Beswarick collaborated closely in bringing the new Gollum to life. Raitt explains, "Jamie would do a bunch of sculptures, and we would talk about them, and I would suggest things that might not move very well. Back and forth, we would work. I would grab a sculpture off his desk, drag it back into our building...The guys in the modeling department would scan it, so we could have rough data for it...Then I would build a digital model of Gollum's face from a cube, and try to line it up to the scan as best as I could. Jamie would come and sit at my desk, and we would pull the model around, see how it moved, see what it looked like with the brows up, and when it was smiling. As we tested the design, Jamie would see, and say, 'Oh, we need to change this, and this.' Then he would run back to his desk, and sculpt the changes in clay. Back and forth, back and forth, until eventually Peter approved it."

#### REASON TO SMILE

Having worked with Gollum for so long, Raitt says, "It's kind of weird to be staring at the same thing for three years, even if it's a piece of moving sculpture

that the world seems to like, and that you've had a childhood affinity for."

Working on Gollum's smile was an initial concern for Raitt. "That kept me up more than anything else," he says. "If we screwed up Gollum's smile, the whole Fellowship, the whole movie, wouldn't really make sense to me. The only reason *The Lord of the Rings* really happens is because Gollum is pitiful, and people haven't killed him many times over. If his smile rang false, if it didn't strike the right chord, you wouldn't buy into him as a character."

**"I GOT REALLY GOOD AT HAVING A LITTLE PIECE OF FRIENDLY CHIT-CHAT WITH PEOPLE, WHILE ALSO BEING ABLE TO ABSORB WHAT THEIR FACE DOES WHEN THEY MOVE, WHICH IS A REALLY DISTURBING SKILL TO HAVE ACQUIRED."**

**— BAY RAITT**

Raitt did hundreds of versions of Gollum's smile. Everybody had an opinion. "I remember that there were a few people that I would bump into who actually had Gollum's smile," Raitt recalls, with a chuckle. "I would sit there and try to not be overtly looking at them." He admits, "I got really good at having a little piece of friendly chit-chat with people, while also being able to absorb what their face does when they move, which is a really disturbing skill to have acquired."

Raitt adds, "I used to go to movies and sit in the front row, pretty much ignoring the film, and I would just watch the faces, just to get an idea of how big Gollum's face was going to need to play and how flex-

ible it needed to be. For the first year-and-a-half I was here, I would walk out of films and feel queasy and sick with angst and worry, and that I was somehow going to be responsible for playing a part in

## I WOULD WALK OUT OF FILMS AND FEEL QUEASY AND SICK WITH ANGST AND WORRY...

— BAY RAITT

screwing up this beloved character. But something happened, we figured it out and came up with a really good system. The face started to just sink in, it was flexible, it looked good, and we could make changes quickly."

Raitt is happy with how the facial system has come together, though it has been an amusing challenge to keep the characters consistent. One of the more common tendencies for animators is to animate their own faces, in part because it's one of the best

references they have while working. Raitt remembers, "Some of the animators, brilliant animators, would have this facial twitch, or a quirk of their own features and expressions — which was charming on them, but which they would want on Gollum as well. I have had to integrate all of these personalities, and the input of these exceedingly talented people."

Raitt concludes with an anecdote from TheOneRing.net, posted by a woman whose husband is hearing-impaired. The man is always frustrated when watching animation, because he can not understand what the characters are saying. The lip-synch is never quite right, or not good enough. However, when he walked out of *The Two Towers*, he turned to his wife and remarked that it was the first time he has been able to lip-read a computer-animated character. ■

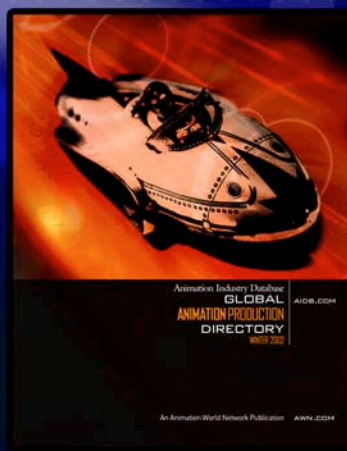
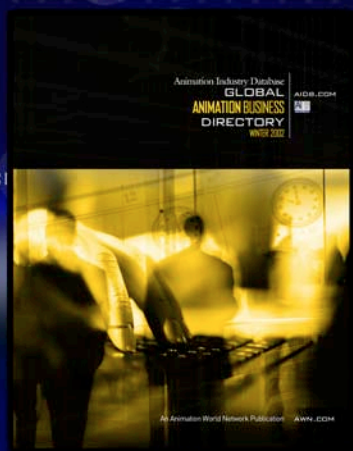
**GREG SINGER** is an animation welfare advocate, eating in Los Angeles.

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CAMERA TRACKING

# Let's *Boujou* It

by Darlene Chan

The logo for boujou 2 features the word "boujou" in a black, lowercase, sans-serif font. The letter "u" is red and has a red underline. A small "TM" symbol is positioned above the "u". To the right of "boujou" is a red superscript "2".

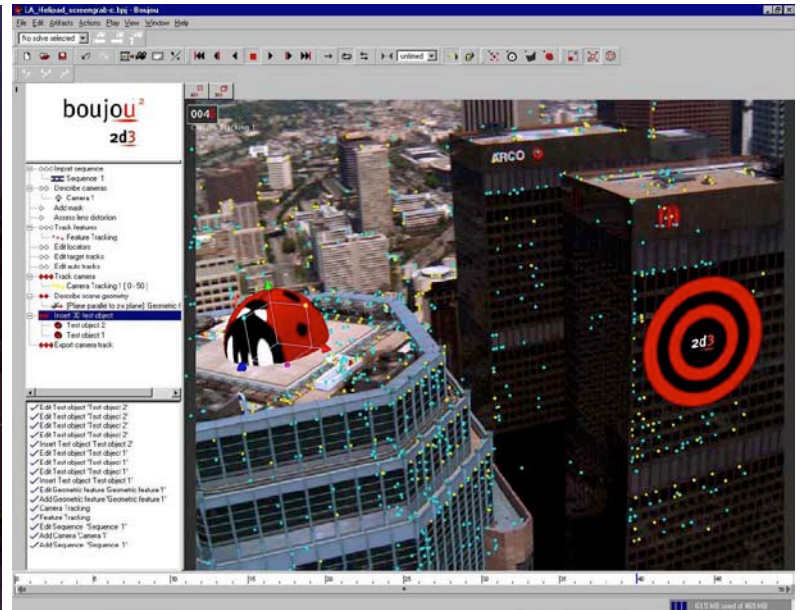
THESE DAYS, YOU MIGHT HEAR VFX ARTISTS TALKING enthusiastically about boujou. No it's not some new French food trend. It's software designed by 2d3, which allows CG companies to accomplish what was previously painstaking work in record time, and with relative ease. boujou (boo-zhoo') is the industry's first fully automated camera calibration and tracking system.

This Emmy award-winning software has been used in many major feature films including *Scooby Doo*, [\*The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring\*](#), *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, *Sum of All Fears*, *Black Hawk Down* and the VES Awards sweeping *Dinotopia* mini series. Also used extensively in commercials, music promos and in architectural and industrial visualizations, boujou offers complete automation, accuracy and the ability to track difficult material. Now, VFX supervisors no longer cringe when a director conceives of a seemingly impossible tracking shot or special effect. Instead they say, "Bring it on. Let's boujou it!" We asked three VFX specialists for their opinion of the software and why they're fans of it.

## IT HAS BECOME A VERB IN THE JARGON AT RING OF FIRE: "LET'S BOUJOU IT!"

— CASEY CONROY

Casey Conroy of Ring of Fire Advanced Media recalls how boujou tracked through a plane of leaves to save the day on a Toyota commercial.



boujou allows users to track through shots automatically, eliminating tedious hand tracking.

### CASEY CONROY, SENIOR VFX PRODUCER FOR RING OF FIRE ADVANCED MEDIA

As a visual effects boutique consistently working on high-end commercials, television, feature films and music videos, we frequently need to integrate photo-realistic CGI work into live-action material. This is an area where boujou really helps. boujou is also a great tool for complex tracking in 2D composites. In fact, it has become a verb in the jargon at Ring of Fire: "Let's boujou it!"

When we receive a backplate with a large perspective move, one of the first things we do is to set a camera track in boujou. We use the software for everything from the hardcore to the mundane, from spots for Toyota, Sony PlayStation 2 and Bud Light to TV episodics to music videos. It's an invaluable tool and an accepted part of our workflow.

A recent project example involving boujou was a Toyota commercial filmed in Prague. The concept was that the Toyota Avalon gives you a lot of personal space. So the spot featured a man walking through an open courtyard lined with trees where leaves clear away around him as he goes by. The practical plates were shot with a big, booming camera move and several different motion control passes. To round out the shot, the agency wanted to put leaves across the entire ground plane not just where they had existed during the actual location shoot. We created a new plane of leaves in Inferno with production elements and used boujou to

track this with the ground plane. The track in boujou was spot on from the get go, and the shot looked beautiful and totally natural. It was a great "save" by boujou, completed in under a day.

A recent episode of *The Drew Carey Show* presented a similar situation, where we had this big camera move and needed to add CG elements and new practical elements to the original live-action plates. The storyline featured office workers having a bit of fun doing the Riverdance on the street below while other office workers heave computers off the building above, causing computers and monitors to go smashing to the ground around them. As the scene developed, the producers wanted to add more and more computers. We created a number of CG computers and also shot computers practically striking the ground and shattering. boujou tracked the scene very quickly. Our expectations are pretty high with boujou and we were happy to see that the additional practical computers tracked in perfectly, giving the clients what they wanted.

boujou offers a big benefit for expediting completion of these and other complex scenes. We are constantly amazed at what the application is able to track. Even with wild perspective moves, tracking can be done automatically within a couple of hours not days, as is the case with hand tracking. And with boujou, we don't have to tie up one of our Inferno suites to do the tracking work, which really maximizes our efficiency and gives us more time to finesse the shots.



THE BEAUTY OF THE APPLICATION IS THAT IT JUST DOES WHAT IT NEEDS TO DO: PRODUCE A MOVING CAMERA FROM FILM OR VIDEO MATERIAL WITHOUT THE NEED FOR THE ARTIST TO TRACK INPUT MANUALLY.

— DAVE FUNSTON

Because of the ease of boujou's automated tracking abilities, Dave Funston of Zoic Studios encourages his clients to be as creative as they'd like with their camerawork.

### DAVE FUNSTON, CG ARTIST FOR ZOIC STUDIOS

**Zoic Studios** completes CG, compositing and other effects work for a range of primetime television shows that includes *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*. One tool we use to help meet the tight schedules and creative requirements of these programs is boujou by 2d3.

boujou is an extremely easy to use piece of software, yet it does amazing things. The beauty of the application is that it just does what it needs to do: produce a moving camera from film or video material without the need for the artist to track input manually.

One example of an instance where boujou performed beautifully for us was on a recent episode of *Angel*. The scene involved a camera move pushing into a jail cell and the director wanted to push all the way through the jail cage, and its metal door, to a close up of the character being held inside. To enable a move on screen that was impossible to create physically, we needed to take the 600-frame, all hand-held shot and reproduce the camera driving right through a digital element we had created for the door. Because we needed the scene done within a week, hand tracking was not an option, so we loaded the plates into boujou and had the shot fully tracked and locked down in just one hour and with just one pass.

With these automated tracking capabilities, we can actually encourage shows to be as creative and cool as they like with their camerawork. This runs the gamut from enabling one-off effects like the one above to facilitating effects that are used several times within an episode, or are recurring from episode to episode. On *Buffy*, for example, whenever a vampire gets "dusted," or killed — which happens a lot! — this calls for a specific type of handheld camera shot effect. Here, the reliable setup in boujou has helped us generate great results, and inspired the production to make these moments even more daring and dramatic.

Most shots are plug-in-and-go, but even when a shot is not so straightforward boujou provides inte-



boujou allowed Zoic Studios to push through a prison door for the TV show *Angel* on short order. On the left is a shot without CG, and on the right is the image with a CG door that the camera will "push" through in the scene. *Angel* courtesy of Zoic Studios.

grated internal tools that let you tell the application more about what's happening. For a challenging spot — let's say something with a lot of talent in it and perpetual camera motion — boujou offers features to help discern that the actors are not part of the scene geometry and that the backgrounds should be kept clean from any disruptions. It's great to have tools to get around problems that are unavoidable, especially in television where re-shoots almost never happen and it's up to you to make the effect work on the material you've been provided!



According to Kevin Baillie of The Orphanage, using boujou lets them employ fewer people to accomplish the same job as quickly as larger studios

ON LONG, COMPLEX SHOTS ... USING BOUJOU CAN CUT TWO TO THREE WEEKS OFF OF THE COMPLETION TIME.

— KEVIN BAILLIE

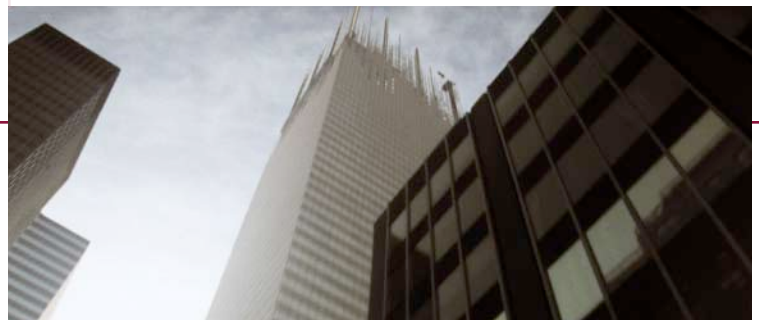
#### KEVIN BAILLIE, CG SUPERVISOR FOR THE ORPHANAGE, INC.

boujou has been a mainstay for us from the day we bought the software, whether for television or motion picture projects. By contrast to studios where dozens of people will be working on match moves for weeks, we have one or two artists, depending on the show, who use boujou to track shots reliably in a few hours.

On a recent film, the upcoming [sequel](#) *Jeepers Creepers 2*, we used boujou to track in a CG creature during a nighttime chase scene successfully. The live-action footage featured actors in a speeding car, shot from a moving truck. With irregular terrain and grass flying by, the scene would have taken an inordinate amount of time to track by hand. We fed the material into boujou and the application then calculated a perfectly accurate solution to allow us to place the CG character into the scene. On long, complex shots like this, using boujou can cut two to three weeks off of the completion time.

A music video we created for Cher's single *Song for the Lonely* required us to replace New York City structures shot in frame with CG replicas that were animated as if they were building themselves up from scratch in time-lapse fashion. We took HD footage of the camera panning up on the buildings, removed the buildings and rebuilt them digitally. boujou was used to track the shots to place all of the digital elements correctly, as well as to solve for the motion of what the camera was doing for shots involving a green screen set.

As you can imagine, 3D match moving is incredibly intense. Its complexities have often relegated directors to doing locked-off shots instead of interesting camera



The Orphanage used boujou to help produce this time lapse shot of a New York high rise which builds itself in the Cher video for *Song of the Lonely*. © Warner Bros Records.

moves and sweeps. Here is where the availability of software like boujou is making a big difference for what's being attempted and achieved. From the artist's perspective, we don't really think, "Oh, no!" when we get a shot that has some crazy camera move. We actually get excited because it inspires us to test and push the envelope. If we didn't have new enabling technologies on hand, we might never push ourselves and our jobs would just become boring over time. ■

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**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 2001, she joined Animation World Magazine.

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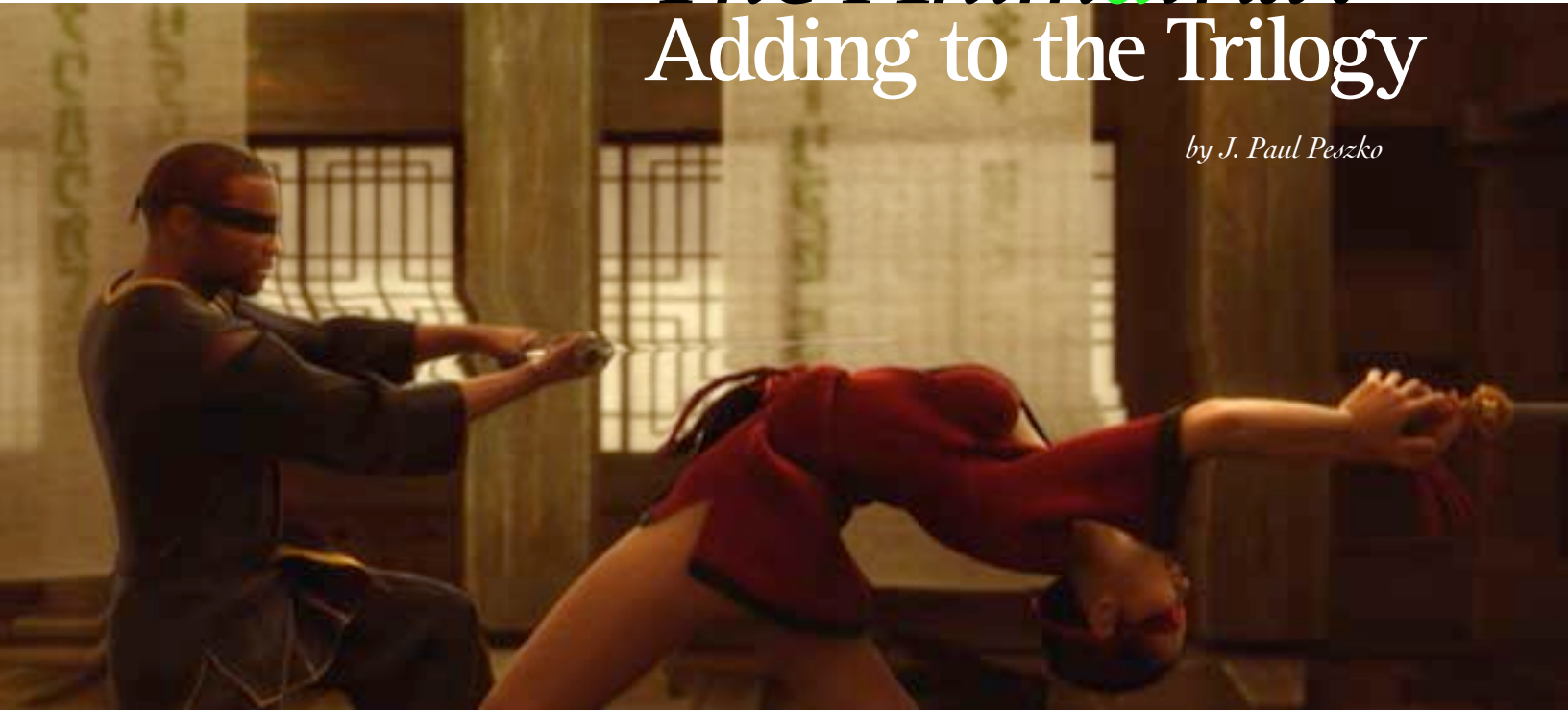
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TRILOGY EXPANDED

# The Animatrix: Adding to the Trilogy

by J. Paul Peszko



*The Final Flight of the Osiris* will be released in theatres on March 21st as an “extra” in front of *Dreamcatcher*. All images © 2003 Warner Home Video. All rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.

FOR THE WACHOWSKIS IT IS ALSO A SENTIMENTAL RETURN TO THEIR ROOTS AS THEY PAY TRIBUTE TO ONE OF THE FORMS OF POP CULTURE THAT SPAWNED THEIR OWN CINEMATIC IMAGINATIONS...

Unless you are a recent arrival on the planet or you have been off-world exploring rotanium ore deposits on Comtron Nine, then I don't have to tell you what *The Matrix* is. And, I'm certain you know what *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions* are. But what in the name of Morpheus is *The Animatrix*? If you guessed that it's an animated version of *The Matrix*, you guessed the obvious, and you guessed wrong. It's not an animated feature at all, but rather a series of nine animated short films, created in anime style to be released as a collection on DVD and VHS by Warner Home Video June 3, 2003. But you don't have to wait until June to begin to view *The Animatrix* shorts, you can begin viewing the first of four of them online at [www.theanimatrix.com](http://www.theanimatrix.com). The Website started streaming *The Second Renaissance — Part 1* on February 4th and will continue with *The Second Renaissance — Part 2, Program* and *Detective Story* through May. Another sequence, *The Final Flight of the Osiris*, will be released in theatres on March 21, 2003 at the head of the new feature *Dreamcatcher*.



### BEYOND THE MATRIX

These feature quality short animated films, each between six and seventeen minutes long are not a rehash of any of the live-action *Matrix* features nor are they based on a given storyline. Instead they tell new stories set in that futuristic virtual world created by the Wachowski brothers, Andy and Larry. Viewers of *The Animatrix* will learn new details of the genesis of *The Matrix* and meet new characters whose adventures are inter-woven with the fabric of all three feature films.

"The Wachowski brothers' vision for *The Matrix* is one that extends far beyond the theatrical trilogy, and the world they have created is so rich that we've chosen to tell these inter-connected *Matrix*-related stories in multiple mediums," Joel Silver, executive producer of *The Matrix* trilogy, explains. "*The Animatrix* takes fans beyond the boundaries of the movie screen and into the vast realm of *The Matrix*, introducing them to new characters and scenarios that further the trilogy's mythology and amplify their cinematic experience."

"In particular," says Silver, "*The Final Flight of the Osiris* serves as chapter 1.5 in *The Matrix* trilogy, giving fans an electrifying ride though the events that occur following *The Matrix* and directly impact the story told in the video game *Enter the Matrix*. In turn, this chain of action sets off *The Matrix Reloaded*. It's



Available on DVD and VHS on June 3rd, *The Animatrix* features nine short films. Michael Arias was recruited by Joel Silver, producer of *The Matrix* to produce the anime shorts series.

THE WACHOWSKI BROTHERS' VISION FOR THE MATRIX IS ONE THAT EXTENDS FAR BEYOND THE THEATRICAL TRILOGY...

— JOEL SILVER

not crucial that fans see *Final Flight* or play *Enter the Matrix* to enjoy *The Matrix Reloaded*, but their movie-going experience will be immeasurably enhanced and they will gain a deeper understanding of the world of *The Matrix*."

**Michael Arias**, Japan-based special effects and digital technology consultant and one of the series' producers, agrees that there is a lot more story there than can be crammed into three feature films. "The idea is basically that each *Animatrix* episode will flesh out or illuminate some facet of *The Matrix* story, or riff on a topic tangential to the films. The truth is that Andy and Larry have thought out the story — perhaps I should say the 'history' — of *The Matrix* in such detail and going back so far before the first movie even begins, that there are more than enough ingredients. I think there's probably as much story in Andy and Larry's heads that won't make it into any of the features, as there is actually told in them."

### A TRIBUTE TO ANIME

Although *The Animatrix* is intended to deepen the experience for fans of *The Matrix*, for the Wachowskis it is also a sentimental return to their roots as they pay tribute to one of the forms of pop culture that spawned their own cinematic imaginations — the uniquely Japanese genre of animated futurism known as anime.

"They're big fans of Japanese animation themselves and I think they saw anime as a perfect medium for pushing *The Matrix* story in directions that wouldn't be possible with *Reloaded* and *Revolutions*. At the



Peter Chung's *Matriculated* tells the story of a sentient robot that is reprogrammed by a group of rebels to be an ally.

THE IDEA IS BASICALLY THAT EACH ANIMATRIX EPISODE WILL FLESH OUT OR ILLUMINATE SOME FACET OF *THE MATRIX* STORY...

— MICHAEL ARIAS

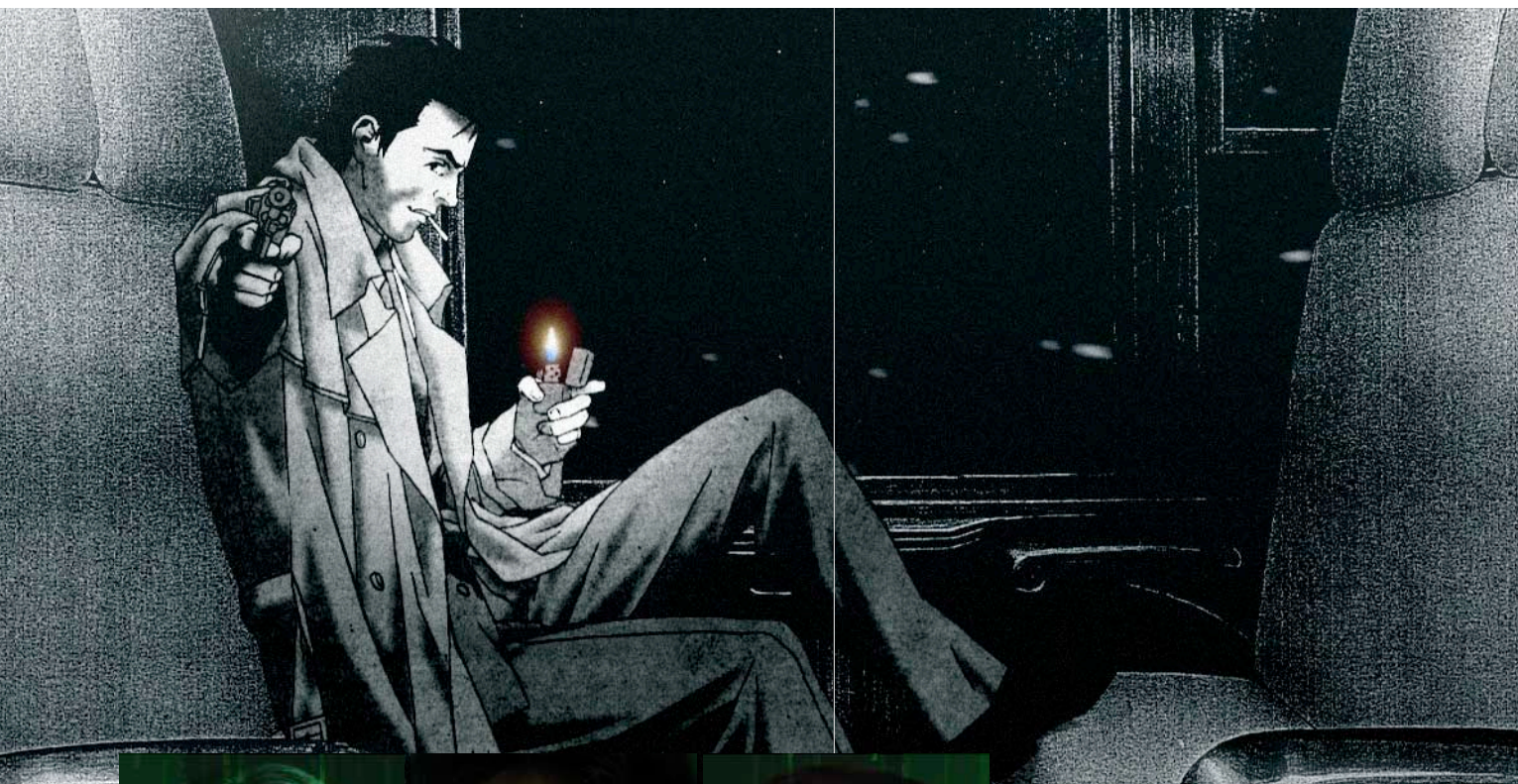
same time, they are paying some tribute to folks like Kawajiri (*Ninja Scroll*) whose work has inspired them over the years," says Arias. This film will not be streamed online like the other eight segments, but will rather be released in theaters with Lawrence Kasdan's *Dreamcatcher* starting March 21.

One of the driving forces motivating the Wachowski brothers as they planned *The Matrix* was to achieve in live-action that same soaring freedom of movement and imagination that had wowed them in their favorite anime films. Classic works such as Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* and Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* had a key influence upon *The Matrix* series.

Did they succeed? **Peter Chung** (*Aeon Flux*), who directed the *Matriculated* segment of *The Animatrix*, certainly thinks so. "To me, *The Matrix* looked like a live-action animated film. The [Wachowski] brothers used digital technology to blend the two mediums. In many cases it seemed they were actually animating their actors."

#### TOP TALENT

*The Animatrix* brings together some of the most respected and innovative veterans of Japan's flourishing and globally popular animation industry and turns them loose in the Wachowskis' teeming fictional universe. Also recruited for the project were two U.S.-based directors, Chung and Andy Jones (*Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*), whose work has been strongly influenced by anime. All of the directors of *The Animatrix* episodes were personally selected by the brothers,



Anime meets noir when hard-boiled private eye Ash tracks Trinity (voiced by Carrie Ann Moss) in *Detective Story*, written and directed by Shinichiro Watanabe.



From left to right, director Andy Jones (*The Final Flight of the Osiris*), and writers/directors Shinichiro Watanabe (*Detective Story*) and Koji Morimoto (*Beyond*).

who supervised the production closely from first concepts to post-production.

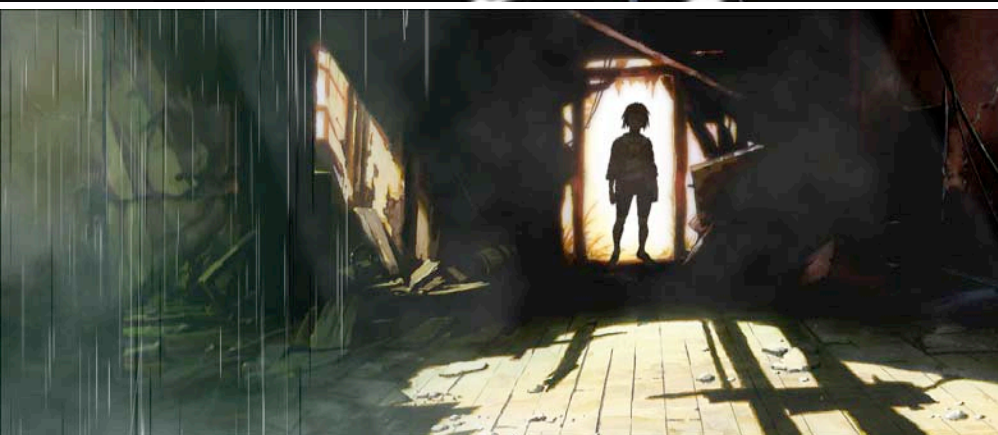
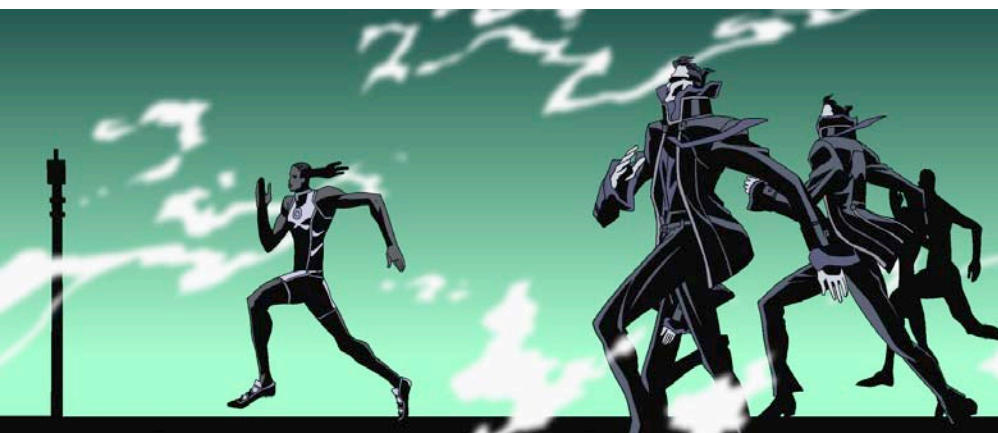
But a project of this breadth and scope doesn't just come together overnight. The rudimentary concept began to germinate some six years ago. The Wachowski brothers and producer Joel Silver first discussed the idea of recruiting anime artists to help tell the larger story of *The Matrix* universe in 1997, during their Japanese press tour in support of *The Matrix*. There they met Michael Arias, who served as their guide through the labyrinth of the anime industry. A CG animation consultant who speaks fluent Japanese, Arias had been working closely for years with leading

anime studios such as Madhouse Studio and Studio 4°C and could appreciate what the Wachowskis and visual effects supervisor John Gaeta had accomplished with *The Matrix*.

When Silver returned to Tokyo several months later to promote *Romeo Must Die*, he invited Arias to produce what eventually became *The Animatrix*.

"We started out with a list of our favorite anime directors, folks who we wanted to be part of our dream team," says Arias. "Obviously some of these folks had scheduling conflicts, and some just weren't interested. But I think in the end we ended up with a pretty killer line-up. It's been very gratifying for me, because it's given me the opportunity to work closely with some of my personal favorites, such as Kawajiri, Morimoto and Peter (Chung)."

The Wachowskis and Silver also invited composer Don Davis to join them on the *Animatrix* journey. Davis has formed a close creative alliance with the Wachowskis starting in 1997 when he composed the score for *Bound*, the off-beat thriller from the broth-



In *Program* (top), written and directed by Yoshiaki Kawajiri, Cis, a soldier of Zion, enters the simulated world of a Samurai training program. Max, a championship sprinter breaks out of the Matrix and glimpses the real world beyond in *World Record* (middle), directed by Takeshi Koike and written by Yoshiaki Kawajiri. Yoko finds a glitch, or bug, in the system inside an abandoned mansion before the exterminators arrive to “de-bug” it, in Koji Morimoto’s *Beyond* (bottom).



Don Davis, composer for *The Matrix* franchise, worked closely with the Wachowskis to create the score for *Animatrix*. Photo credit: Rudy Koppl.

ers. The Wachowskis and Davis again collaborated on *The Matrix* in which he used a mix of classical compositions, popular music, electronic synthesizer effects and even a touch of the avant-garde. The Wachowski-Davis synergy continues with Davis handling all composing duties for *The Matrix* franchise, including the two new sequels, first video game and all nine episodes of *The Animatrix*. In many components of *The Matrix* franchise, he found the opportunity to expand on musical themes he had established earlier in the original feature.

“There was, actually, quite a bit of cross-pollination between the projects,” Davis notes. “*The Second Renaissance*, which covers the backstory of the war between the humans and the machines, utilizes a number of themes that appeared in *The Matrix*, particularly the music that accompanied the power plant sequence, and I had a chance to develop them further. *Final Flight of the Osiris* had a visual and dramatic characteristic that was close to the movies, mostly because the animation was similar to the quality of a live-action film, so I was able to score it as though it was part of one of the movies. There are some thematic materials that are presented in *Final Flight*, which I was able to reprise and develop in *Reloaded*.

## THE LINE UP

Mahiro Maeda directs the two-part epic *The Second Renaissance* (written by Larry and Andy Wachowski), which supplies the backstory for the entire *Matrix* trilogy, recounting the history (only hinted at in *The Matrix*) of the rise of intelligent robots in the early 21st century, their war

for survival with the human race, and the eventual construction of the Matrix.

In *World Record*, the story of a champion sprinter whose superhuman exertions push him through the Matrix barrier, Takeshi Koike creates a heightened sense of visceral physicality that recalls the bulging comic book panels of Golden Age comic book giant Jack Kirby.

In *Detective Story*, Shinichiro Watanabe, the creator of the acclaimed near-future crime anime *Cowboy Bebop*, creates an original visual device with which to suggest the simulated nature of the Matrix: Xerox-like black-and-white images that also set a perfect mood for this story of a hard boiled private eye on the trail of the toughest femme fatale of them all, the Warrior of Zion known as Trinity, voiced by Carrie-Anne Moss.

Andy Jones' *The Final Flight of the Osiris* ties in directly with the main storyline of the series, depicting the struggle of a band of human revolutionaries to deliver a warning message to Neo and his companions in Zion — a message whose eventual delivery serves as a key plot point in *The Matrix Reloaded*.

Other episodes tell what the Japanese animators refer to as "side stories," ranging from incidents in far-flung outposts of the human struggle against the machines (*Matriculated*) to poignant, *Twilight Zone*-style vignettes of daily life inside a Matrix environment. A notable episode of this type is Koji Morimoto's *Beyond*, in which a group of teenagers discover, to their delight, a tiny programming glitch in a forgotten corner of their simulated Matrix neighborhood. Still others, like *Kid's Story*, featuring the voices of Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss, illuminate the backstory of a character (The Kid) who we will also meet in *The Matrix Reloaded*.

So *Matrix* fans, enjoy! There's certainly enough here to please your palate and more. ■

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**J. PAUL PESZKO** is a freelance writer and screenwriter living in Los Angeles. He writes feature articles, interviews and reviews as well as short fiction. He currently has a feature comedy in development and has just completed his second novel. When he isn't writing, he teaches communications courses.

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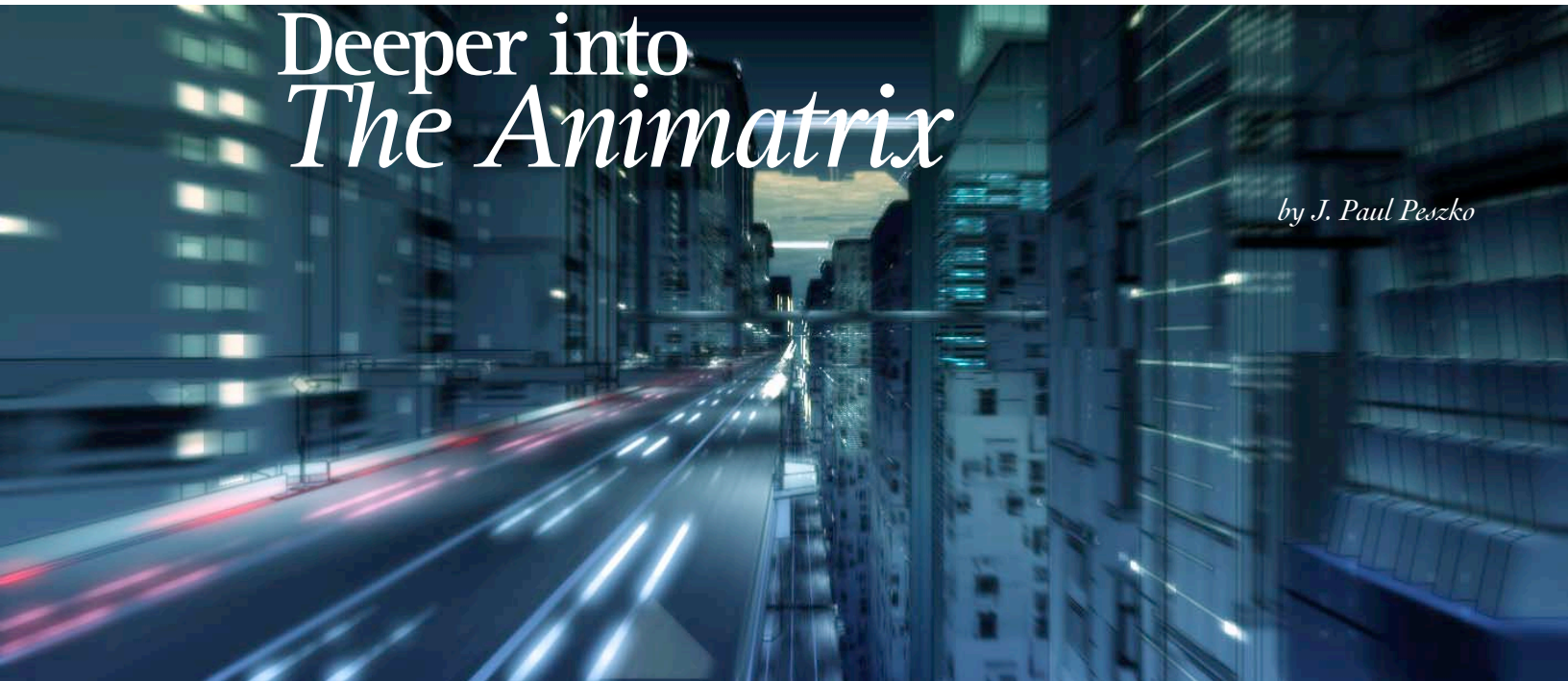
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# Deeper into *The Animatrix*

by J. Paul Peszko

*The Second Renaissance — Part 1*, written by the Wachowski brothers, was the first episode to be shown on the Animatrix Website.

“SEVEN DIFFERENT DIRECTORS, NINE FILMS, LOTS OF DIFFERENT STYLES. IT REALLY GIVES A GOOD SENSE OF THE BREADTH OF TASTES AT WORK IN ANIMATION.”

W

ANT TO KNOW EVEN MORE ABOUT THE UPCOMING [Animatrix](#) series? J. Paul Peszko continues with a Q & A with series producer Michael Arias.

**J. Paul Peszko:** So once you had the individual artists/directors lined up, what about the story lines? How were they plotted and arranged?

**Michael Arias:** One of the great things about these films is that there is no “overall” story line. Except for *Second Renaissance*, a two-parter, none of the episodes have anything in common except for their ‘Matrix-ness.’ Seven different directors, nine films, lots of different styles. It really gives a good sense of the breadth of tastes at work in animation.

**JPP:** How difficult was that in the beginning, trying to coordinate the different directors, the different styles and the different story lines?

**MA:** There was a great deal of back and forth with the Brothers, particularly on some of the early episodes. I worked with each director as well as a crew of translators and a screenwriter to massage each idea into a state that was pleasing to both the Wachowskis and the story’s originator. And then from there, it was straight on to the design work of the film in question: storyboarding, character and set design, layout, etc.

“WARNER BROS. ARE WORKING ON THE ONE HAND TO PLEASE THE WACHOWSKIS, AND ON THE OTHER HAND TO SEE HOW FAR ANIME CAN GO IN THE U.S.”



Arias had to coordinate creative details between seven directors, translators, screenwriters and the Wachowskis. Above, from left to right, are: directors Takeshi Koike (*World Record*), Mahiro Maeda (*The Second Renaissance — Parts 1 and 2*) and writer/director [Peter Chung](#) (*Matriculated*).

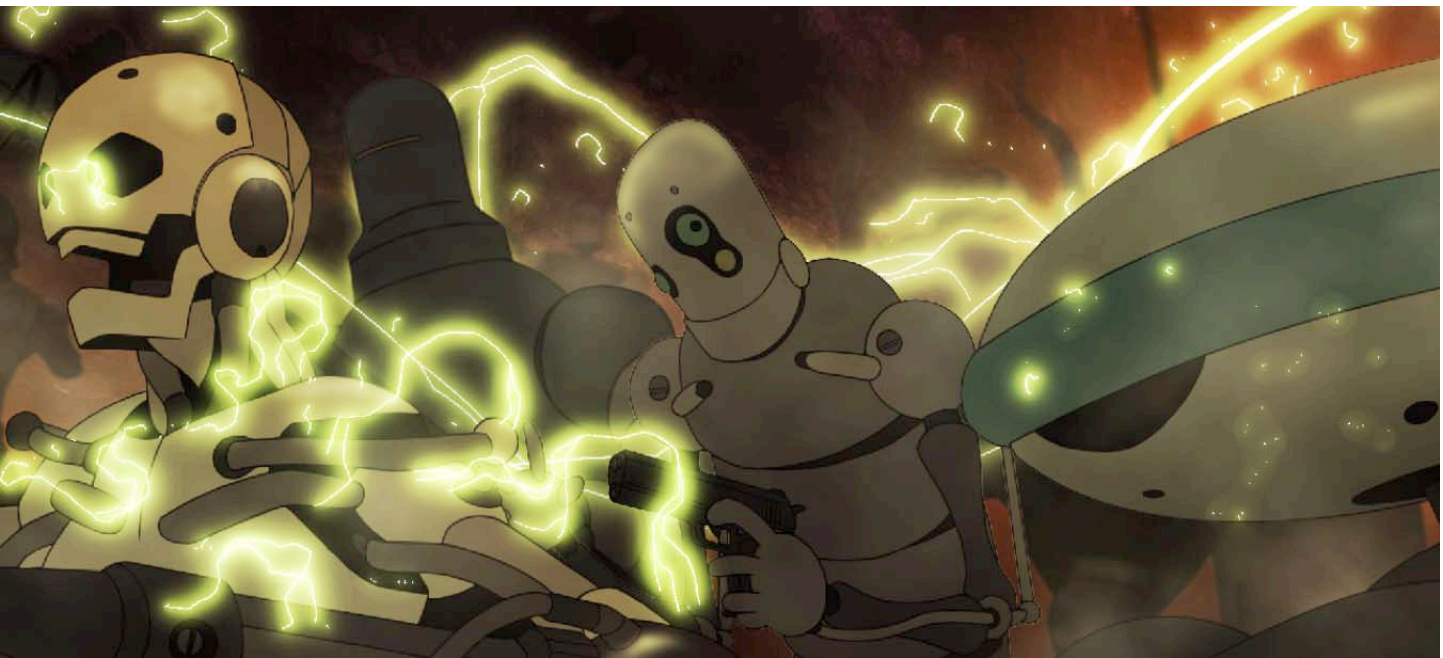
*The Final Flight of the Osiris* (below) connects *The Matrix*, *Enter the Matrix* and *The Matrix Reloaded*.



**JPP:** Were there any treatments or were all the segments plotted from scratch?

**MA:** Some of the episodes — *The Second Renaissance — Parts 1 and 2*, *Kid's Story* and *Osiris* — had treatments written by Andy and Larry. This is pretty much what we started with, and we used these treatments as well as *The Matrix* Web comics as a template for each succeeding episode. For the episodes that Andy and Larry didn't write we just asked the other directors to submit their own original treatments. In some cases Andy and Larry rejected submissions outright, in other cases they requested modifications, and in other cases, they had only positive comments.

**JPP:** Do any of the segments tie into or overlap the feature films?



*The Second Renaissance — Part 2* gives viewers the backstory on how the *Matrix* came to be. *Kid's Story* introduces a new character who is featured in *The Matrix Reloaded*.

**MA:** Some of the episodes — *Osiris* and *Kid's Story* — actually fill in gaps between the films, providing backstory related to a particular event or character depicted there. Others have a less direct relationship to the films. That is to say that some of the episodes simply inhabit the same universe without actually overlapping with the features.

**JPP:** And now a word from the sponsor...How did Warner Bros. feel about shelling out all this extra dough to produce nine animated short features?

**MA:** I think that Andy and Larry really just wanted to do something cool — something that they knew they would enjoy themselves. And Warner Bros., for their part, are working on the one hand to please the Wachowskis, and on the other hand to see how far anime can go in the U.S. That's actually a pretty bold move for a big studio (as bold as making a film like *The Matrix* was). Before *The Animatrix*, the only animation of this quality available to American audiences was either the kiddie epics that Disney and DreamWorks specialized in, or stuff imported from Japan, which is only viewed by a small audience anyway. There's never been a project like this one, not in the U.S., so most Americans have never been exposed to sophisticated storytelling through animation.

**JPP:** What about you, was there any particular point you were trying to achieve in producing this series?

**MA:** One point that I think we're trying to make here, is that while animation is often perceived as a sort of second-tier medium in the U.S., as not really suitable

for serious or adult material, it doesn't have to be that way. That's the great message, in a sense, that anime has to convey to people in America, where animation has been so dominated by companies like Disney, that we've gotten used to thinking of it as a medium that's just for kids.

One of the great things about *The Matrix* was that with its strong anime influence, it established once and for all that these two mediums are really one and the same, and that there's a strong continuity between them. With *The Animatrix*, we are simply making the same point in a different way. Closing the circle, if you will. ■

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**J. PAUL PESZKO** is a freelance writer and screenwriter living in Los Angeles. He writes feature articles, interviews and reviews as well as short fiction. He currently has a feature comedy in development and has just completed his second novel. When he isn't writing, he teaches communications courses.

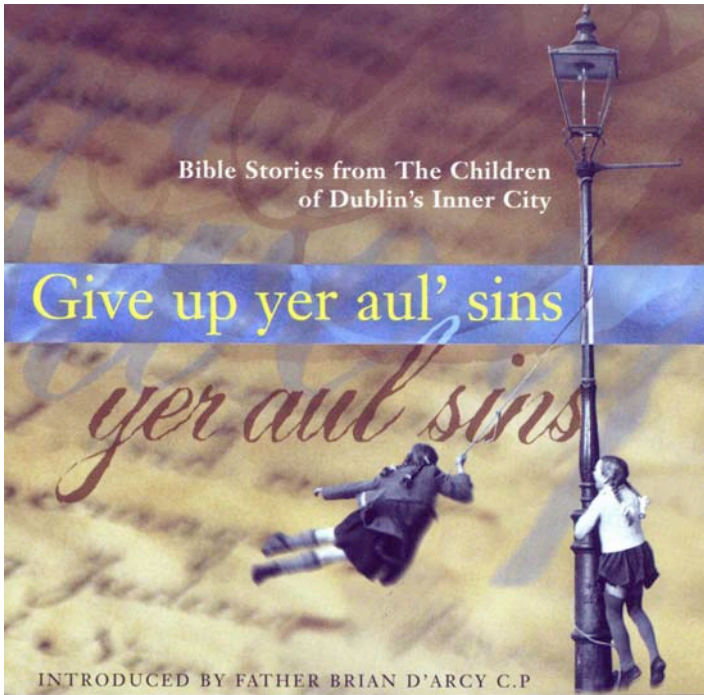
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School teacher Peig Cunningham's recordings became platinum material for EMI. Original recording artwork courtesy of EMI Recorded Music Ireland. Darragh O'Connell (right) shared producing and directing duties on both the short film and series of *Give Up Yer Aul Sins*. Photographer credit: Paul McCarthy.



"DEEP DOWN WE NEVER THOUGHT THIS FILM WOULD EVER BE UNDERSTOOD OUTSIDE IRELAND."

RADIO RE-DO

## Oscar Nom Leads to Success for Brown Bag

by Heather Kenyon

**H**OW DID IRELAND'S DARRAGH O'CONNELL AND CATHAL Gaffney come from relative obscurity to having three series, ranging from pre-school to adult, in international distribution? While an Oscar nomination is not the sole cause, it sure helped. In 2002, the Oscar nominating committee and festival audiences around the world fell in love with a little girl reciting her version of the story of John the Baptist. Now, this short has turned into a series and O'Connell and Gaffney's Brown Bag Films is very busy indeed.

**Heather Kenyon:** From all reports when your short film *Give Up Yer Aul Sins* was among the Oscar nominees last year, you were floored. Why?

**Darragh O'Connell:** Deep down we never thought this film would ever be understood outside Ireland. The recordings the film was based on were so Dublin. The accent was so thick that we just thought people wouldn't get it. They were recorded forty years ago and the quality of them was so rough that we would just never have associated it with the glamour of the Academy Awards.

**HK:** Where exactly did these recordings come from?

**DO:** *Sins* was recorded in 1960 by school teacher Peig Cunningham. She brought in a tape recorder and recorded the little children reciting Bible stories. These recordings got lost or destroyed until 30 years later when Fr. Brian D'Arcy was cleaning up his parish communication center. He discovered what was a recording of the little girls and got it played on radio. This soon became a regular slot as the recordings captured the hearts of the listeners. It also captured the interest of EMI records who tracked down Peig Cunningham and did a deal to release the recordings on CD. The CD became an instant best seller reaching 5 times platinum sales.

**HK:** How did the film come to be?

**DO:** Cathal first heard the recording on Irish radio, eight years after they'd first come out, whilst driving from Dublin to Galway and almost swerved off the road he was laughing so much. On his return he pitched the idea to me that this would make a great animated short. We approached EMI who had the rights to the recordings and after they gave us the go ahead, we put a proposal forward under the Frameworks scheme, funded by RTE, The Irish Film Board and the Arts Council. They liked it and shortly after we had the funds to go ahead and produce it.

I must admit that at first I was a bit dubious, because I thought the film was *too* Irish. I was proved wrong on that one!



The Oscar nomination allowed Gaffney and O'Connell to meet animation heroes John Lasseter and Cordell Barker. John Lasseter photo © 2002 Nibariki. TGNDDTM. All rights reserved; Cordell Barker photo courtesy of Cordell Barker and Production Pascal Blais.

**HK:** How did that nomination change your life?

**DO:** It's one of those things that you can always attach to your name when you're raising funding for a project or trying to get people attached. It has raised our profile abroad enormously and has opened a lot of doors.

The experience itself was fantastic and it was a great buzz to meet many of the people who had been an inspiration for us up to that point like [John Lasseter](#) and Cordell Barker.

**HK:** How have you evolved the short into a series? What can we expect each episode to look like?

**DO:** For us it was a natural progression to make a

series, but it wasn't until the film was nominated for an Oscar that RTE agreed to fund the series. From the moment we saw the reaction to the short we knew we wanted to animate more of the stories. The original soundtrack was taken from a 70-minute CD so we knew there was plenty more material. Often people asked were the other tracks as good, as surely we had already used the best track for the original film, but the fact was, we used that track because it was the first one on the CD and it was the first one that we heard.



Because the original CD recording had 70 minutes of stories, expanding the short to a TV series was a natural evolution. © Brown Bag Films/RTE/RTE International/Irish Film Board/EMI.

I think the new episodes stand up to the original and are just as funny. We tried to remain true to the original and retain the same aged look. Of course we made some changes like adding more traffic on the Dublin streets for the opening shots of each episode. We also had great fun designing extra characters but made a decision to use many of the characters over and over in different roles for each show. We felt it gave more continuity to the shows and let the audience become familiar with the characters. We also liked them too much to include them in roles that were too fleeting and so we used them again and again.

**HK:** Can you talk a little about Brown Bag Films?

**DO:** Brown Bag was founded by Cathal and myself back in 1994. It was a very different climate for anima-

**"THESE RECORDINGS GOT LOST OR DESTROYED UNTIL 30 YEARS LATER WHEN FR. BRIAN D'ARCY WAS CLEANING UP HIS PARISH COMMUNICATION CENTER."**

tion in Ireland at that time. Emerald City and Animedia had just closed down. Fred Wolf and [Don Bluth](#) were cutting back and here were these two young brats going to the bank looking for money to set up an animation studio. I think they saw it as a failing industry back then but it's changed a lot since and now there are a lot of Irish owned studios.

Most of the work for animators is still contract based and we have a steady pool of freelancers who work from job to job. We have a key group of eight full-time people, but during the production of *Give Up Yer Aul Sins* that went up to about thirty people.



Gaffney and O'Connell continue their "animated documentary" style of storytelling with the *Give Up Yer Aul Sins* television series. © Brown Bag Films/RTE/RTE International/Irish Film Board/EMI.

**HK:** Where will people be able to see the series?

**DO:** Right now the video and DVD are on wide release here in Ireland. The series was released before Christmas and became the best selling video and DVD in Ireland of 2002 with the number 1 slot for Christmas! It outsold *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings* and Ireland was the only European country that knocked *Spider-Man* off the number 1 Christmas slot.

The DVD is multi-region so it will work in the States, Australia, etc. The only other way it's available from abroad at present however is through Celtic

Note stores, who have an online order facility. We plan to sort out a facility soon so people can order it from our own Website. The original short is still on view at ifilm.com. But, Monster Distributes will be launching the series into the international TV and video markets at MIP TV so we expect it will be much more widely available soon.



The *Give Up Yer Aul Sins* series and other TV series and film work are now keeping Gaffney and O'Connell's Brown Bag Films very busy. © Brown Bag Films/RTE/RTE International/Irish Film Board/EMI.

**HK:** What is next for you and Brown Bag?

**DO:** Things are now busier than ever. As well as being kept busy doing commercials, TV idents and promo work, we are working on a further 28 episodes of our pre-school TV series *Why?* for U.K. broadcaster Channel 5. This will bring the series to 52 x 2 minute episodes, which will be available from March. The new episodes will be ready in time for MIP TV and this series is also selling very well internationally, currently in about 15 countries. Plus, recently RTE, TG4 and the Irish Film Board awarded us the Irish commission for the international series *Animated Tales of the World*. So we will be starting production shortly on *The Boy Who Had No Story*, written and directed by animation veteran Aidan Hickey. [Editor's Note: This is the largest ever single animation commission award-

**"THESE RECORDINGS GOT LOST OR DESTROYED UNTIL 30 YEARS LATER WHEN FR. BRIAN D'ARCY WAS CLEANING UP HIS PARISH COMMUNICATION CENTER."**

ed by Irish broadcasters, with a worth to the region of 200,000 Euros.]

We have just finished the motion graphics on the station identity for Saudi Arabian State Television. More than 40 idents which we created entirely in house and was a fascinating job involving many trips to Beirut and Riyadh.

Along with this we are also producing a half-hour Christmas special and developing a slate of three low budget features, as well as *Ronan Long Gets It Wrong*, a 26 x 11 minute series, which was recently presented at the Cartoon Forum in Wales. Our next project is a Christmas feature based on Roddy Doyle's [*The Commitments*] book *Rover Saves Christmas* and this is in conjunction with Treasure Films. All in all, it's looking like a very busy year ahead. ■

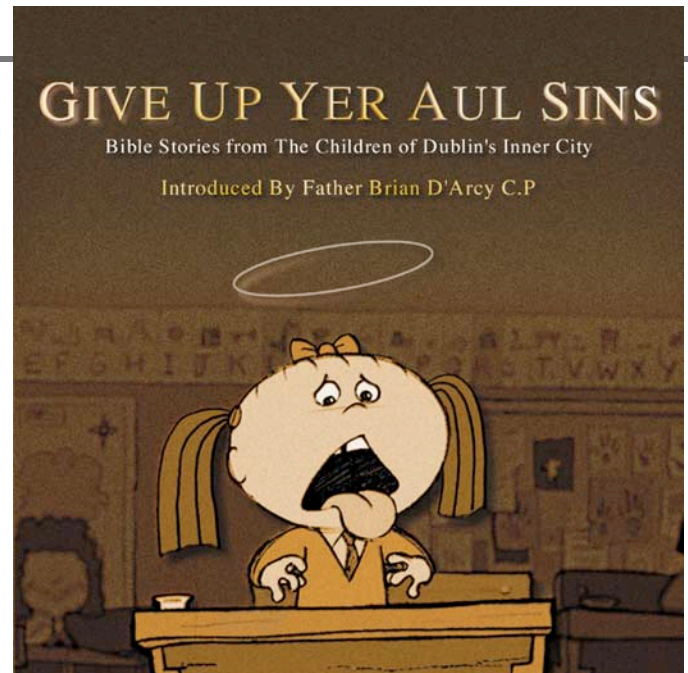


Monster Distributes is distributing Brown Bag's series *Give Up Yer Aul Sins*, *Why?* and *Taxi*. *Why?* is a Channel 5 and RTE pre-school commission and has been sold to Discovery Kids, YLE, TVO, Knowledge Network Canada, DTV Turkey, Hop! Israel and ILCE Mexico, among others. *Taxi*, an adult animation series, is also in distribution and has been sold to RTE, YLE, Paramount Comedy Channel, ABC Australia, Comedy Channel Australia and Canal Plus. At last fall's MIPCOM there was a huge amount of interest in the *Give Up Yer Aul Sins* series and Monster Distributes' Andrew Fitzpatrick will be at this month's MIP TV to continue to sell the three Brown Bag series.

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**HEATHER KENYON** is editor in chief of *Animation World Network*. After graduating magna cum laude with a BFA from the University of Southern California's School of Cinema-Television, Heather began her career in animation at Hanna-Barbera Cartoons, where she became manager of the Production Communications department. She has contributed a chapter to the book *Animation in Asia*, published by John Libbey & Company, Ltd. Heather is also vice president of Women In Animation International and on the Board of Trustees of Trees for Life.

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Because of the smashing success of the short, EMI re-released the original recordings of *Give Up Yer Aul Sins* with a new cover image taken from the film. © 2002 Brown Bag. In association With Bord Scannan Ne Heireann/The Irish Film Board, RTE and RTE International. Soundtrack licensed from EMI Recorded Music 2002.

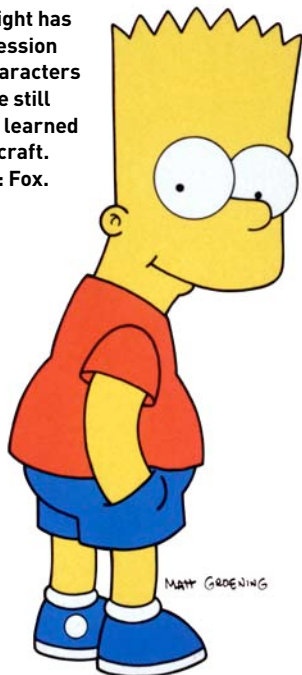
VOICEOVER EDUCATION

# Still Learning After All These Years

by Darlene Chan



Even though Nancy Cartwright has reached the top of her profession by voicing a multitude of characters including Bart Simpson, she still believes there's more to be learned and continues to study her craft. Bart Simpson image rights: Fox.



LET'S SAY YOU'RE A SUCCESSFUL VOICE OVER ACTOR. YOU RUN FROM recording studio to recording studio all around town creating personalities and characters for some of the best animated shows. After all the years of training and classes, you've become the consummate professional with years of experience under your belt. We wondered, could a veteran like that still be surprised by something in the business? AWN talked to nine of the hottest working voice actors and asked, what didn't you realize or what did you learn once you started getting regular work?

## NANCY CARTWRIGHT

A native of Ohio, Nancy came to Los Angeles to attend UCLA in 1987 and got her first professional gig shortly thereafter as the voice of Gloria in *Richie Rich*. Since, she has earned an Emmy for creating the voice of Bart in *The Simpsons*. Currently, Nancy can also be heard as Chuckie in *Rugrats*, Earl the Squirrel in *Timberwolf* and Chip in *The Kellys*, an Internet show produced by Nancy's company *SportsBlast*.

To answer the questions I am going to address the general viewpoint of what it means to be a "professional." As the saying goes, "A writer writes." I don't know who said it, but it totally makes sense, no matter the profession. A painter paints. A bricklayer, lays bricks. Simple. Suffice it to say, a voice actor does voices.

Now, I have been blessed with an "arsenal" of characters, if you will. I have never studied "how to do voices." I just would call up these characters that I developed through experience and slotted them into whatever audition I was doing.

In retrospect, what I didn't realize was that there was so much more that I could be doing. I never felt the need to do any more than what I was already doing because I worked a lot. I did tons of characters for as many shows and had a lot of success in doing so. *And this was before The Simpsons!* It is only now, after 23 years as a professional voice actor that I am opening myself up to actually *studying* voice work. You, dear reader, might think that perhaps, "Nancy has gone a little bonkers." And that might very well be! After all, why would one of the top voice artists think for one second that she would have to actually *study*? Why? Because none of us can afford the arrogance of believing that we already know everything there is to know about any one subject. And that is what I learned: that I didn't know all already! And guess what? I am having a ball!



Sound effects, the role of the microphone and continual character development surprised Dionne Quan, who provides the voice of Kimi in *Rugrats*. Courtesy of Paramount Pictures/Nickelodeon Movies.

### DIONNE QUAN

A crystal-clear image of herself as an actress led Dionne Quan — born almost entirely blind — undaunted down a career path beginning in childhood. The fiercely imaginative 24 year-old plays cowboy-booted, spunky Kimi Finster, the newest addition to the Emmy award winning *Rugrats* cast.

Until I was working regularly, I didn't give much thought to the numerous sound effects that are so necessary in order to convey action in a story. I learned how to do that on the job, and learned all of the incredible nuances from listening to my coworkers. It's a blast!

A microphone is a very sensitive piece of equipment that picks up the softest of sounds. I didn't fully comprehend that until I was called on to read lengthy pieces of copy at an unbelievably rapid pace. Microphones easily pick up the soft sound of my fingers flying across the page as I read.

I also never imagined that the process of creating a character can continue even after you have auditioned and been chosen for a part. Sometimes a character can change drastically, feeling and sounding completely different from the original character on the audition tape. The process involves many people, and can take time. No workshop or book could ever really prepare me for the high energy and intensity of the work, or the joy I will always feel doing it. The sense of freedom the work gives me never ceases to amaze me.

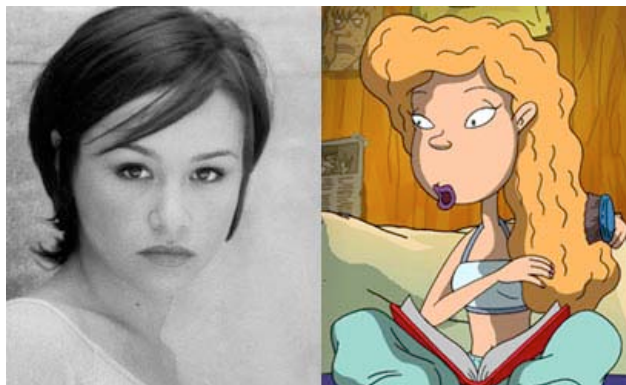


Dom Irrera, who voices Demolition Man in *Hey Arnold!*, didn't expect voice over superstar attitude. © 2003 Dom Irrera Productions.

### DOM IRRERA

Dom is the voice of Demolition Man on *Hey Arnold!* In addition, Dom is a noted stand up comic, having hosted his own HBO special, Showtime series and Comedy Central special. He has also appeared as a series regular on *Damon*.

I was doing a show called *Captain Simeon and The Space Monkeys*. They asked an actor named [Maurice LaMarche](#) if he could do Orson Wells and he replied, "Do you want the 30 year-old or the 40 year-old Wells?" That's how good some of these guys are. Do you remember the hand model episode of *Seinfeld*? How every aspect of the business has their stars? Well this is true of voice overs too. There are a few voice over royalty who are carted around in limos every day to do jobs all over town. So my biggest surprises have been the extremely high level of talent and the small circle of voice over elite.



Danielle Harris, who voices Debi in *The Wild Thornberrys*, was surprised by the size of the voice over community. She expected it to be as large as the on-screen actors' world. Image courtesy of Paramount /Nickelodeon.

### DANIELLE HARRIS

Voice over artist, actress and writer, Danielle Harris stars as Debbie Thornberry, the trendy teenager on Nickelodeon's hit series and feature film *The Wild Thornberrys*.

What has surprised me the most about working in the voice over business is the size of this part of the entertainment industry. I have been a television and film actress for a number of years and I thought that the voice industry was just as large! I had no idea just how difficult it was to break into. I just got lucky and landed *The Wild Thornberrys* with absolutely no voice training or workshops. All I had under my belt was years of on-camera acting classes and I guess that has taught me enough! This part of the business is small and everybody wants to be part of it because it is one of the best jobs in the world! I mean how many jobs do you get to come into work for a few hours once a week in your sweats and pretend you're a talking elephant or a 16 year-old high maintenance drama queen with more issues than a newsstand!

### CHARLIE ADLER

Starring in the primetime Emmy nominated series and international hit *Cow and Chicken* as the voice of Cow, Chicken and The Red Guy, Charlie has over 100 regular characters in over 80 animated series, features and specials to his credit. He can be heard an average of 20 times a day all over the world. Most notably as Buster Bunny in Steven Spielberg's *Tiny Toon Adventures*, Ickis in *AAAH!!! Real Monsters* and Ed and Bev Bighead in *Rocko's Modern Life*. Adler's vast experience in the voice over industry has led him to direct the voices for both the *Rugrats* and *The Wild Thornberrys* series, as well as their respective motion pictures.



Charlie Adler, who provided both title characters' voices in *Cow and Chicken* and is a voice director in demand, finds that voice actor work challenges every acting skill he has. Courtesy of Cartoon Network.

The initial thing that really struck me on my first animation job was, "Wow! I really belong here!"

I am completely lying...I was terrified! I was in a room full of the most versatile, skilled, free falling, improvisational and technically adept actors that I had ever worked with. I shook for the first season of *The Smurfs*, and every day that we recorded, I became more of a fan of the medium. Frankly, coming from the starring role of a hit Broadway show and the National Tour, made me feel in my arrogant ignorance, that cartoons were beneath me, and that, except for the income, they would be a cakewalk! What an idiot I was! The theatre training and background I came from helped enormously, but it was rounded out by the improv company I was in for a year in New York and the character repertoire that I had evolved over the years.

Animation, is an actor's medium, and what surprised me and still does, is the skill, the fearlessness, the energy, the commitment to character, the imagination, the willingness to free fall and take chances, the ability to listen to other actors and respond quickly, the ability to turn on a dime and shape shift and an overall willingness to appear foolish.

Now that I also direct, it is evident every day the actors who are right for this medium and who are not. And don't let any arrogant jerk in any interview pass this medium off as anything less than amazing! What surprised me the most, was how much of my energy and talent this medium uses, and how it pulls the best of my skills as an actor, not just a voice or noise maker, but ACTOR!



Voice recognition surprised Kyla Pratt of *The Proud Family*. Photo credit: Cliff Lipson; *The Proud Family* © Disney.

### KYLA PRATT

*Kyla Pratt lends her voice to Penny Proud, a 14 year-old embarking on the trials and tribulations of bad hair blunders and fashion faux pas in Disney Channel's The Proud Family.*

I have been in the business for a while and what still surprises me is the fact that people actually recognize your voice from a character you play on a cartoon. What I realized by doing *The Proud Family* was that doing voice over is very difficult. You have to create the character's personality with your voice. You can no longer rely on what you are doing physically, i.e. facial expressions and body language.

### DEBI DERRYBERRY

*Possessing one of the most unique children's voices around, Debi is the voice of the precocious [Jimmy Neutron](#) on both the big and small screens. She has racked up an impressive list of feature and TV credits, including the original *Toy Story* and its sequel as Weenie, and *Catrina* on *Oswald the Octopus* and *Betty* in *Clifford*.*

I have been in the voice over business for 15 years. When I first began to work in voice over, I did office work to make ends meet. As I became more established and started working more in VO, I was able to quit the part time office jobs and was surprised to find that I was able to make a really good living working in voice over. In fact, I have little time to do anything else since I have auditions almost everyday and need to be available every weekday just in case a job comes up.

I realized that the voice over community is very small. The women that I seem to work and audition with for children's voices, are the same small group over and



Debi Derryberry, who is the voice of boy genius Jimmy Neutron, realized that being a good on-screen actor doesn't guarantee that you'll be good at voice over work. Photo credit: Chris Ameruso; *Jimmy Neutron* image courtesy of Nickelodeon.

over again. In animation, there seems to be this core group of people who book most of the work. Hundreds of people audition for each cartoon, but the fact remains, that there is almost always the same group of people that get the jobs. This is interesting since when we audition, the producers and casting directors don't usually know who we are since they only hear the recorded audition and don't see us.

I also realized after having worked with dozens of on-camera celebrities as guest stars on cartoons, that being an "on-camera" actor doesn't guarantee that you are going to be a good "voice over" actor. Some actors who do both well that I have worked with are: Tim Curry, Patrick Stewart, Laraine Neuman, John Astin, Fred Savage and Mark Hamill, to name a few.

### SHAYNA FOX

*A freshman at UC Santa Barbara, Shayna balances college with voice work as Reggie in Nickelodeon's *Rocket Power*. A naturally gifted athlete in tennis and karate, Shayna chose to pursue on-screen acting and voice work. She has also found time to produce and direct two videos, the award-winning *Ten Minute Run* and *On Growing Older*. Shayna's vocal work will be featured in a full-length TV movie, *Reggie's Big Break*, airing July 26, 2003 on Nick.*

When I first started doing voice over work, I didn't know how much commitment it entailed. The more time I spent in the studio, the more I realized how important it is to put my whole heart into every recording session. It is my job to give the character life. I learned that the audience's ability to feel the character's persona depends on how much energy and fervor I invest into the line readings. Also, if I am hesitant in how I deliver a



Shayna Fox, who is the voice of Reggie in *Rocket Power*, learned that a good voice actor gives her whole heart, and not just her voice, to a character. Photo credit: Atilla Azodi; *Rocket Power* image courtesy of Nickelodeon.

line, the character will appear hesitant and her emotions unclear. Therefore, I try to be specific in the emotion my voice is conveying. I also find that it is better to be over the top and have the director bring me down, as opposed to under-acting in voice over. Most importantly, when I walk into an audition or a job, I bring three things with me: confidence, a positive attitude and my voice!

### CLANCY BROWN

*Crossing over effortlessly from on-screen work to voice over acting, Clancy Brown is identifiable to viewers as the crusty Mr. Krabs from *SpongeBob SquarePants*. On the big screen, he's known as *Rawhide* in the cult classic *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai* and *Captain Hadley* in *The Shawshank Redemption*.*

Well actually, I took a workshop once. It was very illuminating and not easy. Our teacher told me I had a speech impediment that would limit my future in the VO world and she may yet be right. The difference for me was I was already acting. In fact she forgot all about my speech impediment after she saw me in something. Before that moment I was learning a lot. After that I could do no wrong and the class became useless to me.

What surprised me about voice over work in animation was how welcome I was made to feel. I had always been a big cartoon fan so I was awestruck when Jim Cummings, [Frank Welker](#), Tress MacNeille, Rob Paulson, Jeff Bennett or Jess Harnell would be in the same room. I probably should have been intimidated but I was too busy laughing to get too self-conscious. It is a terrific environment — a party really. I am just glad to be invited every now and then.



Money-lovin' Mr. Krabs is voiced by Clancy Brown, who found that working with the animation community was like attending one big fun family party. *SpongeBob SquarePants* image courtesy of Nickelodeon.

I don't think I can over-emphasize how talented these people are. Charlie Adler, Jennifer Hale, Phil Lamar, EG Daily, Rodger Bumpass, Tom Kane, Tara Strong, Tom Kenny and of course, My Man — Kevin Michael Richardson can turn any over-paid on-camera superstar into a quivering puddle of flop-sweat. There's nothing malicious about it. On the contrary the directors and talent that I have worked with (with one ridiculous exception) are supportive and patient and immensely generous. It's just that worlds are brought to life by these people and, with the exception of perhaps Robin Williams, there isn't a movie star out there that could keep up. I sure can't. But I have such a good time hanging on by my fingernails that I've developed a craving for it.

I'm an animation-session junkie. Some actors dream of dying onstage in the final scene of *King Lear*. My hope is that I am in the room with Rob, Tom, Jeff, Kevin, Tress, Tara, Jess and Jennifer laughing so hard I can't breathe and Charlie sticks his head in the door and delivers the knife-edge-of-tasteless coup-de-gras.

I am 100% sincere. Getting into animation is the best chance I've ever taken with my career. ■

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**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 2001, she joined *Animation World Magazine*.

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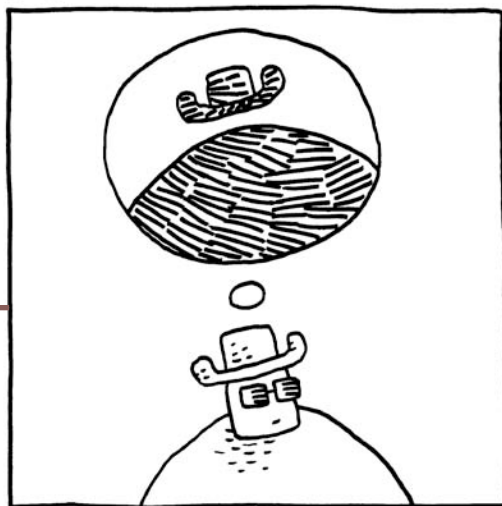


Illustration by [Andreas Hykade](#).  
Courtesy of Chris J. Robinson.

HYKADE

## Elbows and Cakeholes

ANIMATION PIMP

HOLD UP...BEFORE SOME OF YOU SCHMUCKS START WRITING IN SAYING..."COME ON PIMP, OF COURSE THE OSCAR SELECTION IS A JOKE...WHAT DO YOU EXPECT?"

by *Chris J. Robinson*

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

'LL BE THE FIRST TO ADMIT THAT 2002 WAS NOT A GREAT YEAR for animation films. There were a number of okay-good-decent works, but nothing that really stood out, nothing that I've any real desire to postpone a repeat screening of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Six Feet Under* or *Hockey Night in Canada* for. Nevertheless...there were certainly a handful of films that warranted [Oscar nominations](#) over the suspect list of shorts that got the nods. *Mt. Head* by [Koji Yamamura](#) is about the only title (well...okay...maybe I can accept *Das Rod*) that deserves to be on this list. But are you gonna tell me that this asinine piece of shit called *The Chubb Chubbs*, a film that only a chair could love, or *Mike's New Car* (ha ha...the monster has problems with his car...HA HA HA...oh god that's so damn original, so clever...and hey...look the blue monster hair is SO REALISTIC) is a better work than Chris Hinton's *Flux*, Robert Bradbrook's *Home Road Movies*, Jonas Odell's *Family and Friends* or Priit Tender's *Mont Blanc*? And what of the Mexican puppet film, *Close to the Bone*? (Yeah...okay...the credits are WAY TOO LONG but still...). Hell, there are festival rejects that are better than most of these nominees.

And hold up...before some of you schmucks start writing in saying..."Come on Pimp, of course the Oscar selection is a joke...what do you expect?" I say, "STOP." I know it's old hat to bitch and moan about the lack of taste (and yes folks let's call it for what it is) of the Academy voters, but look...animation fights tooth and nail for exposure and respect...especially festival animation. The Oscars are an important vehicle because they have the power and influence to bring these films

to the attention of a much wider audience than either Annecy or [Ottawa](#) (for example) can. It's also important for the animators from a financial perspective. It gives them leverage for future funding. Unfortunately, what the world is seeing is a heavily unbalanced, unfair and watered down to the point of being a desert, competition.

### THE CUMBERSOME PROCESS

Okay first things first...according to a couple of Academy voters, this is how the whole process works.

To enter, you must fill out an entry form. Then you have to set up something like two to three public screenings in the Los Angeles area. This isn't so hard because for a few hundred Yankee green (according to more than a few people, this rate magically rises each year) you can get the Laemmle Theaters to show your work of beauty. BUT HOLD ON...If your entry has won a first prize in a recognized film festival (like...gosh golly gee, that dandy animation event in Ottawa), you receive a 'buy' of sorts, meaning you don't have to worry about a public screening.

Each year a letter is sent to all Academy members of the shorts branch asking them if they want to watch all the entries. Given that the screenings only take place in Los Angeles over the course of many weekends, there ain't many folks outside the L.A. area goin'. This L.A. *selection committee* (let's say) composed of maybe 30 boys and girls, watches all the films (so we assume) and narrows the list from about 300 or so entries to, this year, nine films (i.e., the short list).

## SO WHAT THE WORLD IS GETTING IN THE END IS A FRAUDULENT REPRESENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL ANIMATION.

For a film to make it to the short list it must receive an average vote of 8.5 (6 is the worst, 10 the best). Needless to say, it's pretty easy for a few malcontent slugs to blacklist a title or two but giving low marks...but hey...we know that there's no one like that in the L.A. animation community.

Now get this, prior to this year the short list was a poorly kept secret AND the films were ONLY shown in Los Angeles. Fortunately, some knuckleheads pulled their heads out of their asses and set up member screenings in New York and San Francisco (there might even be a London screening too) so that area members could vote. Unlike the animation features category, screeners are not sent to members, they must instead be screened in a theatre to be voted on. (Oh...and apparently Canucks were invited to New York but none were able to make the ten hour drive.)

### NO SHORTAGE OF SHORTCOMINGS...

It doesn't take a Mensa member to see the shortcomings here. FIRST, the Academy is only getting about 300 films. Ottawa got 1700. Annecy got around 1400. Even smaller festivals in [Holland](#), Hiroshima and [Zagreb](#) have over 1000 entries. (Yes...some of these are ineligible commissioned works, but in Ottawa 75% of the entries are short films.) And this isn't really a surprise. Unless you're fortunate enough to win first prize at an approved festival, you've got to fork over a few U.S. dollars to set up a screening. Most entrants would be scared off way before that when they see that they've got to set up a public screening. I mean...how many non-studio backed animators can afford this? The NFB in Canada is loaded and have staff and money to look after the Oscar submissions, but what about the rest of Canada? When was the last time we saw a non-studio supported Canadian animation in the running? And what about indie animators in the rest of the world? They spend most of the year just trying to find money for prints, videos, stills, entry fees (in the U.S. of course)...how the fug are they supposed to come up with a few hundred magic beans AND ship their film print to/from L.A.? Tough toodies I guess.

This small body of films is then judged by maybe 30 Academy members, most of whom (not all) are either old farts and/or studio types who likely don't go to many international animation festivals AND have a

prevalence toward farce/gag/anthropomorphism films. I'm not knocking them per se. Nothing wrong with liking cute monsters and all that assorted techno fetish stuff BUT, are these same people open minded/informed enough to deal with [Mulloy](#), Kovalyov, [Pärn](#), [Dumala](#), let alone Hinton, Cournoyer, [Odell](#) or Broadbrook? (I suspect of course that [Home Road Movies](#) was deemed NON-animation by the liberal Academy members.) There are other voices...not all of whom ONLY love good ol' fashioned chuckle a minute shorts with lovable nippleless animals, but clearly they are a minority.

So what the world is getting in the end is a fraudulent representation of international animation. And this isn't an anti-American rant, so take those about to be breathed words and stuff them back down your pipehole. These are Los Angeles awards, they are a celebration of the Hollywood industry. There's absolutely nothing wrong with that EXCEPT that you're leading the public (those three people who care about the animation short category!) to believe that these five animations represent the best of animation around the world and, taste issues aside, we all know that is complete and utter bullshit. Why the hell not just call it the Best American Animation Short (Yes...why not do the same with the Best Film as well!)?

### CAN WE HELP?

So what's the solution? Boycott? Nah...that means even less representation. Perhaps making more of an effort to contact animators would be a start (I've heard through the grapevine that Ron Diamond, for example, contacts, encourages and helps a number of filmmakers whose films he saw and liked at international festivals). [Editor's Note: Ron Diamond is the co-founder and president of Animation World Network, [www.awn.com](http://www.awn.com).] A better explanation of the entry procedure, or simply doing away with this ludicrous public screening rule would be a start. And aside from offering the Academy frat club either 1. an elbow in the mouth or 2. a swift kick up their crusty, aged cakeholes for their myopic tastes, why not invite more international representation? Wouldn't it make sense for the Academy to have a closer link with ASIFA International? Now I realize that you couldn't just have every ASIFA member become an Academy member, but why not invite the ASIFA International

## WHY NOT INVITE THE ASIFA INTERNATIONAL BOARD OR THE PRESIDENT OF EVERY NATIONAL ASIFA CHAPTER TO BE AN ACADEMY MEMBER?

Board or the President of every national ASIFA chapter to be an Academy member? It would not only encourage those people to explain the entry process to their members, but it would also widen the taste buds of the voting process. And what about festival programmers/directors? "You" might not like my taste, but you can't argue with the fact that I easily see at least 1000 new films per year as do my colleagues around the world. Why would the Academy not welcome the obvious expertise of festival programmers?

So naturally...the absolutelybestestgreatestfantasticstupendous step that the Academy can take is to vote me in, right now.

Okay...it's March...Spring is coming...the birds are singing...let's not end on bad terms. We've still got the Animated Feature category and at least the feature voters showed great humour by nominating that

horsey film over *Mutant Aliens* for Best Feature. That's one of the great pranks of the century. What a riot those guys are! Ba ha ha ha.

### HOTTIE ANIMATOR(S) OF THE MONTH

For their generosity and time during my short February visit to New York, I say *merci* to [Bill Plympton](#), Signe Baumann, Richard O'Connor and [Candy Kugel](#) (whose pasta blows the overpriced trickery of da Silvano away). ■

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**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>*

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It's dubious whether partners Jan and Jace did *Space Ghost* any good. Courtesy of Cartoon Network.

TOON PSYCHOLOGY

# From Sidekicks to Superkids

MOST CLASSIC ANIMATION FANS TODAY ADMIT TO HATING THESE SIDEKICKS...

by Martin "Dr. Toon" Goodman

IF THERE IS A SIGNIFIER TO CARTOON ACTION SHOWS of the 1960s and '70s, it is that of the young "sidekick." These ubiquitous youngsters appeared in almost every series featuring superheroes, ostensibly giving the viewing audience a figure (or figures) with whom to identify. Their true purpose, in retrospect, appeared to be as preteen plot devices: getting into peril, serving as bait, inadvertently stumbling on to important clues or villain's lairs with equal aplomb, and laughing heartily at the conclusion of an episode seemed requisite for the job. The reward was adventure, in some cases a cool costume, and the inestimable prestige of teaming up with *superheroes*... even if the runts in question did endanger said heroes' lives in most episodes. Most classic animation fans today admit to hating these sidekicks, who were often saddled with a tertiary animal sidekick as well; one is reminded of scientists turning microscopes on parasites only to find smaller parasites feeding on them.

## THE DESPISED

Some of the most remembered (and despised) sidekicks of the bunch were Jan and Jace, who spent their adolescence doing *Space Ghost* little good. Marvin and Wendy were two spunky tykes known for befouling the *Super Friends* adventures long before Wonder Twins Zan and Jayna were turning themselves into puddles and critters respectively for the same luckless team. (If the darker, more recent incarnations of Batman were present for these cartoons, all these sidekicks might have perished in their first episodes.) No one knows from what egg Birdboy hatched, but fans of the old *Birdman* and the *Galaxy*



Did *Super Friends* really need any sidekicks? Courtesy of Cartoon Network.

*Trio* show likely would have cooked up a fluffy quiche rather than let that particular sidekick take wing. Before Saddam Hussein besmirched the Middle East, the hapless twins Chuck and Nancy were giving the unfortunate *Shazzan!* many sleepless Arabian nights. If prehistoric puerility was your cup of lava, you may have wondered why *Dino Boy* didn't cause Ugh to hurl himself off the evolutionary tree. My personal bugbears were Tom and Tubb from the *Moby Dick* half of the team-up with *Mighty Mightor*, but any kid that showed up in pretty much any action-adventure series could typically be found going over a waterfall, falling off a precipice, facing an avalanche of rocks and needing some sort of last-second rescue.

#### INEQUITIES IN GENDER ROLE SOCIALIZATION AND AN EMPHASIS ON APPEARANCE (RATHER THAN PERFORMANCE) LEFT MOST GIRLS GREATLY IN NEED OF EMPOWERMENT.

I am convinced that audiences deplored these sidekicks just as much as I did. Reviews of these cartoons both in print and on the Web describe them as "lame," "worthless," and generally a waste of even limited animation. It may be no coincidence that three contemporary shows featuring kids as the heroes are among today's most nostalgic treasures: *Speed Racer*, *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* and *Jonny Quest*. These cartoons were the exception to the rule, but they made no lasting difference. After the superheroes and action-adventure shows began to disappear courtesy of regulations prohibiting violence and peril, kids were most often seen as comic sidekicks rather than adventurous ones. Until recently. There has been a significant change in the number of young heroes and heroines in the animated universe. There are several reasons for this phenomenon, all of them linked to changes in American entertainment and society.

#### TAKING CHARGE

Perhaps the most salient change is the recent dogma that self-esteem and empowerment are at least as vital as reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic as far as a child's education is concerned. Research conducted in the early 1990s suggested that high self-concept correlated strongly with high scholastic achievement. Young schoolgirls were the initial beneficiary of these studies; researchers such as Carol Gilligan and David and Myra Sadler posited that inequities in gender role socialization and an emphasis on appearance (rather than performance) left most girls greatly in need of

## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL COMMUNITY IS NOT THE ONLY FACTOR IN THIS SURGE OF EMPOWERMENT.

empowerment. Before long, psychologists demonstrated that the benefits of healthy self-esteem generalized to both sexes. While the construct of self-esteem alone didn't explain everything related to academic performance or social adjustment it appeared to hold enough credence to get educator's attentions. Entire curriculums were built around empowerment, and soon every school-age child in America was getting regular pats on the back (in some cases for less than admirable scholastic achievements). As we have seen in my previous column, ["The Kids Are All Right,"](#) educational and psychological research tends to find its way to the studios and networks in the form of consultants who put theory into practice. Let us examine for a moment how children's empowerment manifests itself in popular animated cartoons.

There is no doubt that the heroes of *Dexter's Laboratory* are Dexter and Dede. Dexter is phenomenally brilliant and inventive, but had this series been made anywhere from 1967-1987 Dexter would likely have been the peppy young assistant of an adult "Doctor Science" or such and Dede would have been a gaping tagalong. Adults figure significantly in *The Wild Thornberrys*, but we realize — as reinforced by the [feature film](#) — whose show this truly is. Although the Rugrats adventures are milder than Eliza's, it is interesting how many of the storylines have been concerned with honor, doing the right thing, or correcting a perceived injustice. Of late, Disney has offered teens, preteens and animation-loving adults the adventures of *Kim Possible*. This lively, funny series about a high-school cheerleader-cum-superspy features a capable and appealing young heroine for which any kid can cheer. Speaking of empowered young girls, evil has had no rest since *The Powerpuff Girls* brought preschool power to Townsville.

[Mo Willems](#), who cut his teeth on [Sesame Street](#), has recently produced a series for Cartoon Network called *Codename: Kids Next Door*. These aren't just any kids; they're an anarchic bunch of low-tech oper-



A kid took front and center stage in *Speed Racer*. Courtesy of Cartoon Network



*Fat Albert* used kids as heroes, not just sidekicks. © William H. Cosby, Jr. Exclusive licensee: Hallmark Entertainment, Inc. All rights reserved.



Can animated children's fare just entertain instead of acting as a teacher all the time? Psychologists study *Dora the Explorer* in minute detail to learn what the show is teaching children. Credit: Nickelodeon.

atives out to upset the adult order. Twenty years ago Virgil Hawkins would have been a sidekick instead of a headliner; in 2003, he's an electrifying hero on his own as he deals *Static Shock* to evil gangbangers. Let's not forget the miniature *masacritas* of *¡Mucha Lucha!*, either. Whether these kids are facing off in the ring or upholding the masked wrestler's code of honor, "It's all buena!" Earlier times might have seen the wee grapplers (and the superkids of *Teamo Supremo*) playing kiddie corps to a Roger Ramjet-style hero. In short (so to speak), kids and teens in today's animated cartoons are more heroic, command more power and are less dependent on adults than ever. Many of the characters listed above do acknowledge, respect and love the adult figures on their respective series, but are in no way in need of rescue by them or see them as the sole sources of approval and self-esteem. Virgil Hawkins' father, in fact, has not the slightest clue that his own son is the flashiest hero in the hood. Today's animated kids do not shine in the reflected glory of adult heroes; they are heroes in their own right.

#### OTHER MEDIA INFLUENCES

The psychological community is not the only factor in this surge of empowerment. Japanese manga and anime have been riding the trend for a long time and as more anime infiltrates and influences American viewership, themes of "kid power" are reinforced. Although I personally find both *Dragonball Z* and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* virtually indecipherable, most of the heroes appear to be no older than thirteen or fourteen. Much the same can be said for the still-popular Sailor Scouts, and enough has been said about *Pokémon*. More artistic anime (such as the films of *Miyazaki*) also feature clever, resourceful children whose courage and inner resources are equal to those of any adult. *Spirited Away*, *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Kiki's Delivery Service* are among the films that show children to be more complex and imaginative than the Superfriends could ever give them credit for.

The message that kids can be heroes was also reinforced by the live-action cinematic community. Not only were such films popular, they were profitable, since teens and preteens make up much of what passes for the film audience in America. *Home Alone*, *The Karate Kid* and *Spy Kids* are probably among those most visible in this regard, and live-action TV has followed suit with shows such as *Malcolm in the Middle* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The Disney Channel in particular is producing what amounts to soap operas for the middle and high school set. In the Sixties, kids on TV were just that — kids, and their twee adventures largely took place inside the family-



*Kim Possible* (left) and Eliza Thornberry are both capable heroines who don't take a backseat to anyone. *Kim Possible*: © Disney; *Wild Thornberrys*: Courtesy of Nickelodeon.

based sitcom. In the Seventies and early Eighties, the same sitcom squirts were not only preternaturally hip to the grownup world, they were given adult, one-line zingers that rang false to everyone but the scriptwriters. Now the kids are truly having their day, and there is no doubt that children both older and younger truly enjoy live-action programs in which they are smart, in control and the center of the action.

The concepts of self-esteem and empowerment may have been the engine that powered animated children out of the shadows and into their own, but influences from anime, movies and live-action TV also played their part. I might also mention the burgeoning market in books starring, and aimed at, age 6-15; although I am attempting to limit this discussion to influences from the visual media, print media is also a factor in the cultural shift toward the empow-

erment of children. In truth, kids are never again going to be content with secondary roles in entertainment aimed at them. The day of the kiddie corps and the lame sidekick is probably over. This may be one of the best benefits gained by having the psychological community give their input to animated shows. While I still question why parents entrust this job to psychologists (or don't have the time, or trust themselves enough), it is heartening to see that kids are getting the message from someplace. In an increasingly difficult and contentious world it may behoove us in the future to have more superkids and fewer sidekicks. ■

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

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BOOK EXCERPT

# The Long and the Short of it

by Gene Deitch



Crabby Appleton is "rotten to the core!" From the CBS-Terrytoons series *Tom Terrific*.

THERE IS NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT TO ANIMATION THAN THE PRECISE SPACING BETWEEN YOUR ACTION PHASES — YOUR INBETWEENS.

An excerpt from Gene Deitch's book, [How To Succeed In Animation \(Don't Let A Little Thing Like Failure Stop You!\)](#).

**T**HE ART OF ANIMATION TIMING IS RELATED TO A BASIC ELEMENT OF all art, and that is contrast. What makes a painting, a drawing, a sculpture, a building, a play, a movie, or a piece of music, or any object visually or aurally interesting and dynamic, is contrast: *dark against light, large against small, blur against sharp, straight against curve, rounded against angular, close against distant, loud against soft, silence against sound, long against short, slow against fast, pause against action...* Those last pairings are at the heart of animation timing.

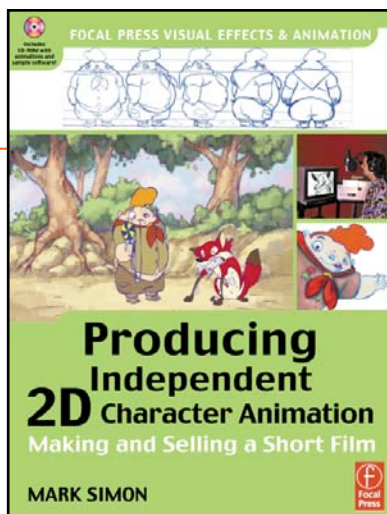
When drawing the phases of animation — the inbetweens — you would only use perfectly even spacing if you were animating a machine. Nothing alive moves in evenly spaced increments of your 24-frame seconds.

In my book, I allude to this in general terms in Chapter 3, "[Animation For Dummies.](#)" Here I will try to be more specific. There is nothing more important to animation than the precise spacing between your action phases — your inbetweens. If you want to create impact, the spacing must be increasingly greater as you approach your end position of an action. If you want to create a "soft landing," your spacing must progressively decrease as you move toward your end position. In the complex series of moves within any scene of animation, the interplay of short against long, pauses against movement, close spacing against long spacing — contrast of movement — is exactly where you create the illusion of life — comedy, drama, whatever. ■

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**GENE DEITCH** is one of the last surviving members of the original Hollywood UPA studio of 1946 and the instigator of the CBS-Terrytoon "renaissance" of 1956-1958. He was also: Animation Department Chief of the Detroit Jam Handy Organization, 1949-1951, Creative Chief of UPA-New York, 1951-1954, Director at John Hubley's Storyboard, Inc., New York, 1955, President of Gene Deitch Associates, Inc., New York, 1958-1960, Creative Director for Rembrandt Films, 1960-1968, and star director for Weston Woods Studios, Inc., Weston, Connecticut, 1968-1993. He has worked for over 40 years with the Prague animation studio, "Bratri v Triku."

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BOOK EXCERPT

# Concept to Creation: *Basic Tips*

by Mark Simon

*This is the first in a series of 12 adaptations from Mark Simon's new book Producing Independent 2D Character Animation: Making and Selling a Short Film. This book is a full-color concept-to-pitch guide that teaches animators, students and small studios the art and business of producing short, cel animation films. Animation producer Mark Simon has detailed the process in an accessible how-to manner using his award-winning series, Timmy's Lessons In Nature, as a guide. This 432-page book features over 600 full-color images, interviews and a CD-ROM containing sample animation, animatics and sample softwares described in the text.*

EVERYONE LEARNS OR DISCOVERS SOME TRICK TO help them in production. Some tricks are simple, and others are a bit more complex, but they all help us do our work. Following is a sample of decades of experience from many animators around the world.

## DRAWING TOOLS

- For fine lines and small drawings, mechanical pencils maintain a fine line and don't need sharpening.
- When pencils get short, use an extender. They can be found at many art stores. The Koh-I-Noor Pencil Lengthener is sold at [www.DickBlick.com](http://www.DickBlick.com) and many art supply stores. Any extender will extend the life of your pencils.
- Install a switch on your animation stand that allows you to switch between your top light and your back light quickly.
- Keep toys around for reference. Workout Barbie flexes just like a human and is much better reference for poses than the old Woody art store figures.



**Tools of the Trade** (clockwise from top left): Pencil extenders; a three-way switch which allows quick switching between top and bottom lights; reference figures of Workout Theresa (Barbie's friend) and the classic "Woody" poseable; and peg bars.



**Smoke** (left) animated with black charcoal; the line color is changed to white then blurred for the effect. The red line (above) on the original art acts as the shadow line. Notice in the colored cel how the red line has been colored to match the shadow.

### ANIMATING

- Start with short projects ranging from a few seconds to one minute long and complete them. Don't try animating 5 to 10 minutes for your first few samples — you may never get them done. Short and complete is good.
- Life drawing. Life drawing. Life drawing.
- Use the top peg bar if you don't want your hand to lay on the bottom screws and bottom pegs while you're drawing. Use the bottom peg bar if you prefer to flip multiple sheets to see the motion, while animating.
- Allow yourself to think about a scene for a while before you start animating. Spend a little time thinking about the action, the motivation, the humor, the follow-throughs and anything else that will enhance the scene.
- A great way to animate smoke is to use charcoal on white, use multiply on the image (a command that removes white in most compositing programs; it's also automatic in most ink and paint programs), change the line color to white, and then take it out of focus. Below is an animated sample of this process.

### ANIMATION DRAWINGS

- Don't color in the shadows on the final clean-up art, even with blue. The shading will show up in the scans.
- Use a red pencil for shadow lines. They will still scan black, but then they can also be used as a reference by the digital ink and paint crew to indicate which lines are the shadow lines.
- Use peg hole reinforcements, much like binder paper hole reinforcements, but sized and shaped to fit over peg-bar pegs, when the paper holes start to get loose.

### SCANNING

- Save scanner software settings, such as DPI, contrast, position, etc. This allows you to re-scan portions of scenes without having to start over, and all the drawings will stay registered.
- If you have a peg bar taped to your scanner, mark its exact placement in case you need to remove and replace it.
- Many scanners have a black back on their lid. Tape a piece of white paper over it or the black will show through your semitransparent animation paper.

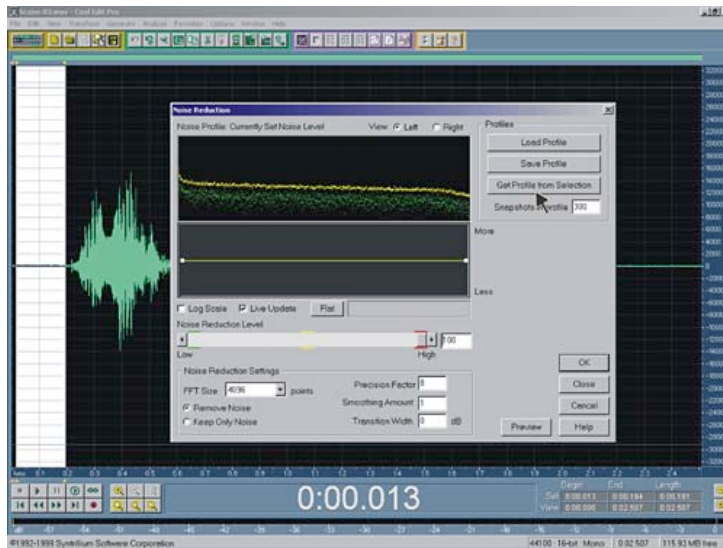
### INK AND PAINT

- Paint with one color through an entire scene, then pick another color and go through the scene again. This is much faster than painting every color on every frame as you go because you don't have to change colors and tools as often.
- Every object in your drawings needs to have its own palette position, even if many of them are the same RGB (red, green, blue — the color channels used in computers) value. If you ever need to change the color of an object, you will only need to change that single RGB value of that palette position, and the object will be automatically updated in your ink and paint software. For example, if you use the same palette position for white socks and for the whites of eyes, and then you want to change the color of the socks to red, you would either end up with red eyes too, or you would have to repaint all the socks in the entire scene.
- When scanning charcoal or pastel drawn cels, use a mounted peg bar on your scanner. Do not use an autoseed or ADF (automatic document feeder) because the rollers on the autoseed will smear the art.

### AUDIO

- When you are using an inexpensive microphone, use two windshields on it to cut down on excessive noise and pops.
- Digitally remove all background noise from your recordings so that all the audio elements will edit together better. Casting and recording really funny voices can inspire better animation. Videotape recording sessions to get motion references from the voice actors. Actors tend to move a lot when doing their sessions, and their expressions and movements can be very helpful and inspiring.
- When an actor has a stuffy nose, honey and lemon in warm water helps break up the phlegm.

For many more tricks including other topics such as storyboards, computers, backgrounds, rotoscoping and organization, check out *Producing Independent 2D Character Animation*, published by Focal Press. It can



Removing audio noise using Cool Edit Pro. Grab a selection from the audio that should be silent, get the noise reduction profile from the selection, and then apply that profile to the entire file. Any background noise in that profile will be removed.

be bought at any bookstore or [online](#).

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**MARK SIMON** founded and owns A&S Animation, Inc., an award-winning cel animation house in Florida, which develops and produces character animation for commercials, TV, training videos and the Web. He also owns Animatics & Storyboards, Inc., the largest storyboard house in the southern United States, which has provided work on over 1,200 productions. Mark's accomplishments include owning an award-winning advertising firm, being a syndicated cartoonist, production designer of film, TV and animations, and writing entertainment industry books and lecturing on both animation and storyboards. Having won over 30 animation awards for his efforts, Mark has directed Timmy's Lessons In Nature (which he sold as a TV series), My Wife Is Pregnant, numerous commercials, training videos and television series special effects. Read more about [A&S Animation](#) and the author.



### How To Succeed in Animation (Don't Let a Little Thing Like Failure Stop You!)

GENE DEITCH, A SUCCESSFUL AMERICAN ANIMATION DIRECTOR, USES EXAMPLES OF HIS OWN FAILURES TO MAKE POINTS AS TO HOW YOUNG ANIMATORS CAN AVOID SOME PITFALLS ON THE WAY TO SUCCESS, AND STIRS THE POT WITH MUSINGS ON THE MEANING AND WONDER OF ANIMATION. A GREAT READ FOR ANYONE INTERESTED IN THE WORLD OF ANIMATION.

PUPPET PRODUCTION

# Having Soul:

# 45

## Years of Nukufilm Studio

by Chris J. Robinson



In its 45 year history, Nukufilm has grown and changed. *Little Peter's Dream* (top) was the studio's first movie and *Way to Nirvana* marked its entry into the 21st century. All images © Nukufilm Ltd.

WHILE THE ROOTS OF ESTONIAN ANIMATION CAN BE traced back to the 1930s when a trio of men made a rather awkward American wanna-be cut-out film called *The Adventures of Jukus the Dog*, this turned out to be a one shot deal. In truth, Estonian animation was born in 1957 with the creation of Nukufilm (meaning "puppet film"). Despite decades of uncertainty under both the Soviet Communist system and the global marketplace, Nukufilm has survived, thrived and is now celebrating its 45th anniversary.

### TUGANOV THE TRAILBLAZER

Ironically, Elbert Tuganov, the father of Estonian animation, was actually born in Baku, Azerbaijan (1920) and began his animation career in Germany working for a couple of commercial studios including the Döhring Film company. When Hitler took power, Tuganov decided it was best to return to Estonia, where he served for the Estonian Army (which was incorporated into the Red Army when the Soviets took over Estonia). After his discharge from the army in 1946, Tuganov sought employment at Tallinnfilm (the state film studio). He was offered a cameraman's assistant position in their "so-called animation department." For eleven years, Tuganov shot, drew, and painted titles and credit sequences. During this time he also modernized the studio's primitive technical apparatus. "Originally," says Tuganov, "they used to nail the credits to the wall and the camera was set up on a tripod." So, in order to shoot credits more adequately and fashion trick shots, Tuganov built an animation stand that would allow the studio to do frame by frame shooting. A visiting Moscow official was impressed by the new apparatus and suggested that the studio make animation films.

Tuganov immediately set out to find scripts and stories that would be suitable for production. He landed a Danish story called *Palle Alone in the World*. This became the basis for the

first Nukufilm production, *Little Peter's Dream* (1957). In the film, a troublesome little boy, a playground bully, endures an evening of nightmares in which he wanders through a deserted city. In the end, the boy awakes fearful but with a new awareness of the importance of being kind to others. Consequently, he returns to the playground with a much better attitude.

### IRONICALLY, ELBERT TUGANOV, THE FATHER OF ESTONIAN ANIMATION, WAS ACTUALLY BORN IN BAKU, AZERBAIJAN...

With a running time of twenty minutes, *Little Peter's Dream* is far too long and the main character is not interesting enough to hold the audience's attention. Nevertheless, the film is not as primitive as one might expect. The animation is awkward and jumpy at times, but the character rendering and set design are, not surprisingly given Tuganov's architecture aspirations, quite accomplished and original.

For the next four years, the filmmaking process mimicked that of the first production — six or seven people worked on the film alongside artists from the Estonian puppet theatre. "We ordered the puppets for our first films according to sketches from the puppet theatre," says Tuganov. "The theatre made the puppets for us and then we made the film." After the fourth film, *Mina and Murri* (1961), animation production received a budgetary blessing from Tallinnfilm. The division's staff grew to twenty and it was decided that the puppets would then be fashioned in the studio.

As with the entire country, the film industry was governed by a planned economy. Productions had to be formulated and budgeted in advance. A yearly plan that included a list of films had to be made. Each screenplay had to be submitted to Moscow for approval. A storyboard was then created and both script and storyboard were sent for approval to the management of the studio. Prior to completion, the director would show the studio producer a mute version of the film. If all was deemed acceptable by the artistic commission, then the film was handed over to Goskino in Moscow where they then ordered screening prints for distribution throughout the Soviet Union.

#### A HELPING HAND

By 1961, it became clear that Tuganov alone could not maintain enough of a workload to keep everyone employed. He decided to find a second director. Heino Pars worked as a camera assistant to Aimée Beekmann on *Little Peter's Dream* and *A Forest Tale* (1959). When Beekmann left, Pars stepped in and worked as cinematographer for the next eight Nukufilm films.



An animation stand and a visit by a Soviet official pushed Estonian animation pioneer Elbert Tuganov to make *Little Peter's Dream* and start Nukufilm in 1957.

Pars was always approaching Tuganov with ideas for films and in 1961 he was finally given his first opportunity to direct. Initially he made a test episode and then came his first solo film, *Little Motor Scooter* in 1962. After *Little Motor Scooter*, Pars created the first Estonian animation series, featuring the recurring character Kõps the cameraman. In each film (there were four in the series), Kõps takes viewers on expeditions to various "exotic" locales like the Mushroom Land, Berry Forest, and Uninhabited Island.

The production schedule at Nukufilm was set up so that when one director finished a film, another was immediately ready to start the next. "When Pars started making films," says Tuganov, "we each had people we tended to work with and there were also some people we shared. There were two art directors and we each had one. [Georgi] Tsukin worked with Pars and I worked with a succession of different art directors. We had to have two cameramen because the production periods overlapped. Then we reorganized things so that each had his own crew but we still traded people back and forth. The staff of each crew was not rigidly defined."

#### GROWING UP

While Pars spent the 1960s focussed primarily on the *Kõps* series, Tuganov began alternating work on children's films with more adult themed satires and also began experimenting with cut-out animation.

ORIGINALLY, THEY USED TO NAIL THE CREDITS TO THE WALL AND THE CAMERA WAS SET UP ON A TRIPOD. — ELBERT TUGANOV

Such films as *Just So* (1963), *Park* (1966), *Stubbornness* (1966), *Cogwheel* (1968) and *Pedestrians* (1971) gently mocked modern Soviet bureaucracy.

What makes Tuganov's satires and parodies so interesting is that they fuse Estonian identity (through the characters and the many contributions of Estonian writers, musicians and artists) with aspects of Western culture. It is easy to see why children and viewers in the Soviet Union loved Estonian animation. It gave not only a peek inside another culture, but also at another world. As Heino Pars noted in an interview, "They [Russians] regarded us rather well and they loved coming here for visits very much because being here was a little bit like being in the West."

"Our films were different from Moscow films," says Tuganov. "Each frame of a Moscow cartoon or puppet animation was filled. There was not even one square centimetre of clean surface. We here in Estonia had clear surfaces. We had breathing space and our colour tones were beautiful and somehow different." And in fact, the bright colour tones of which Tuganov speaks had roots in Pop Art and the lush, bright tones that we associate with 1950s American design and architecture.

Tuganov exposed himself to a great deal of animation, film and art and obviously knew, through his travels especially, what trends were occurring in modern art at the time. "There was no information blockade," says Tuganov. "We saw the newer Disney films and so on. I attended the [Ottawa festival](#) and other festivals many times, so I was not isolated."

In 1972, Pars made one of his strongest works and easily the most adult tale Nukufilm had produced: *Nail* (1972). Over a decade before [John Lasseter](#) went to all that digital effort to humanize lamps, unicycles and snow globes, Pars, without computers, achieved the same effect using nails as his protagonists. *Nail* consists of four short comical stories dealing with such decidedly saucy topics as seduction, betrayal, drunkenness and the ever-comical death.

Throughout the 1970s, Pars continued to fuse his love of nature with animation and the best results were *River of Life* and *Song to the Spring*. *Song to the Spring* combines puppet animation with live-action backgrounds as an old man awakes with the day and conducts the forest birds, flowers, sun and grass to rise and sing. The mixture of puppet animation and live-action is awkward at times. The puppet character does not add any special dimension to the film that a



Heino Pars, who worked as a cinematographer for Nukufilm, created and developed the studio's first animation series, *Little Motor Scooter*, which introduced Kõps the cameraman.

live actor could not have. In fact, the film is essentially a live-action film. Nonetheless, Pars manages to express his love of nature enthusiastically yet gently, without crossing into the realm of cheesy new-age serenity. Nothing feels forced or deliberate; *Song to the Spring* emerges simply as a document of the new day and season, a celebration of re-awakening and the on-going process of being.

*River of Life* is a fitting end to Pars' career. (He did make two more films after that, but neither are particularly interesting.) As the title suggests, the constant motion of the river symbolizes that of life. While there is a thread linking the film's images, ending with the birth of a child, the film is at times more akin to non-narrative experimental film. Pars seems intent on capturing the fluidity, conflict and random beauty of the always-flowing river. Pars possesses a great eye for detail. He doesn't just blandly depict the water as a whole but shows us its individual drops in all their fragility and personality, and further takes us underwater to show us an assortment of forms, shapes and creatures. The river, like life, is marked by ebb and flow... this, now that.



Rao Heidmets used puppet theatre to dramatize the cruelty of the world in *Papa Carlo's Theatre*.

### A NEW GENERATION: ATTEMPT #1

During the latter half of the 1970s, Elbert Tuganov realized that he and Pars were getting wrinkly and that new directors were needed. With the exception of two attempts in the early 1970s, Tuganov and Pars were the only directors at the studio from 1958-1975. "They were so full of power and energy," says Arvo Nuut, the current Nukufilm producer, "They didn't lack ideas and did the work that had to be done but after that period they realized that new people were needed." They sought people who could easily fit into the style and ambitions of the studio. This first group, which included well-known Estonian artist Kaarel Kurismaa, Nukufilm animator Aarne Ahi and former cameraman Kalju Kurepõld, did not work out as hoped. Kurismaa and Kurepõld were already mature artists. The films were not so good. Everyone but Ahi returned to their own artistic worlds. By 1980 Nukufilm was back to square one.

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**TUGANOV HAD BECOME FASCINATED WITH 3D FILM TECHNOLOGY AFTER SEEING THE WORK OF SOME MOSCOW FILMMAKERS.**

### TUGANOV GOES HI-TECH

Meanwhile, Tuganov made a handful of technically audacious films, including the astonishing time-lapse film *Inspiration* (1975), a document of the famous Estonian song festival, and what may be the world's first stereoscopic (what we used to call 3D films) puppet animation films *Souvenir* (1977) and *The Dappled Colt* (1981).

*Inspiration* is perhaps Tuganov's finest achievement, at least conceptually. The film is a pixillated

document of the preparations for, and performance of, the famous Estonian Song Festival. We witness the day's swift rise, then people dressing and assembling for the festival, and by the film's end, a massive gathering of Estonians singing. The film is seemingly unremarkable in that it's just a gathering of people, a conventional chronology of a day in the life. But when one considers that this was Soviet-occupied Estonia during the repressive days of USSR President Leonid Brezhnev, the film is a monumental patriotic achievement. It stands as a subtle, yet ultimately overwhelming, celebration of Estonian culture in firm defiance of Soviet occupation.

Following *Inspiration*, Tuganov decided to make a 3D (stereoscopic) animation film. Tuganov had become fascinated with 3D film technology after seeing the work of some Moscow filmmakers. "The Russian technology was different from the American system," says Tuganov. "The Americans simultaneously projected film from three different projectors onto the same screen to create the effect. In the Russian system, the camera squashed the picture together into one frame. The lens of the projector decompressed the picture into 3D format and only one projector was needed. The negative was the same, only the frame was slightly larger." Upon returning from Moscow, Tuganov decided to make the first 3D puppet film in the USSR and encountered no objections from Moscow nor Tallinnfilm. The 3D process was so interesting to Tuganov that he made another stereoscopic film, *Dappled Colt*, which would turn out (although he didn't know it at the time) to be his final film.

### NEW VOICES EMERGE... FINALLY

In 1982, Tuganov retired from Nukufilm leaving the studio desperate to find new directors (Heino Pars continued to make films until 1990). Fortunately, this time around the studio's recruiting efforts were more successful because they went after young people who hadn't found themselves as artists yet. This new group included Rao Heidmets, Kalju Kivi, Riho Unt and Hardi Volmer. "They didn't save Estonian puppet animation, but developed it further," says Arvo Nuut. Then again, one could argue that the quartet did in fact save the puppet studio because clearly with Tuganov gone and Pars running out of steam, Nukufilm was desperately in need of some fresh voices to keep film production going. If they did not save Estonian puppet animation, they certainly preserved it.

### RAO HEIDMETS

Rao Heidmets joined Nukufilm in 1982 as an animator and within a year he started his first film, *Pi-*

## IT BECAME CLEAR THAT TUGANOV ALONE COULD NOT MAINTAIN ENOUGH OF A WORKLOAD TO KEEP EVERYONE EMPLOYED.

*geon Aunt* (1983). "It was a good time for me because they were looking for new talents and I started to work with Priit Pärn. He was like my first and only teacher in animation," explains Heidmets.

*Pigeon Aunt* is an innovative film and the use of a three dimensional cut-out technique immediately sets it apart from anything previously created at Nukufilm. "I feel I did what I wanted with *Pigeon Aunt*," says Heidmets, "and I remember that I had this thinking that it was a new technique. The 3D cut-out was Pärn's idea and this was a new technique and I thought that maybe I should adopt this as a style but then I wanted to try different things. Maybe this was a mistake, I don't know but I think each film I made was different from the last."

Excluding the Christmas film, *Päkiapikupuu* (1991), Heidmets' most successful works are his last three films: *Papa Carlo's Theatre* (1988), *Noblesse Oblige* (1989) and *Living Room* (1994). *Papa Carlo*, made in collaboration with Priit Pärn, uses a puppet theatre as an allegory of a desensitized world where atrocities and violence are an everyday reality. In *Noblesse Oblige*, Heidmets, using large puppets, this time criticized the shallowness of a bourgeois family. *Living Room* is Heidmets' most successful film. It is a mix of scratch animation and pixillation. *Living Room* examines the relationship between three generations: a woman, her father and her young daughter. Heidmets' use of high contrast film, with the violence of the scratched images, and the stuttering pixillated movements, all combine to give the film a dark, tentative and tense environment.

After completing *Living Room*, Heidmets turned away from animation, making feature films for children. From 1999-2001, he was in charge of the Children and Youth Program at Estonian State TV. This year he returned to animation and has started pre-production on his first puppet film since 1994.

### KALJU KIVI

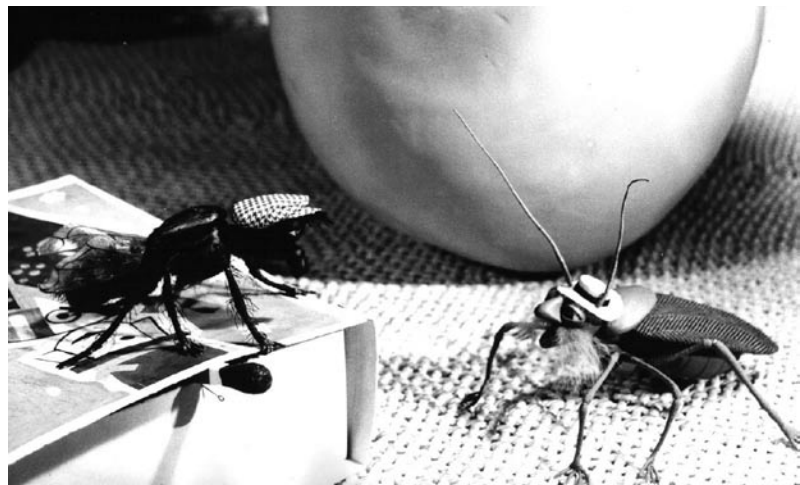
In terms of quality and diversity of techniques, Kalju Kivi is the most ambitious and exciting animator in Estonia. Since his first film, *Sheet of Paper* (1981), Kivi has animated with objects, puppets, photo collage, cut-out, string, fabric and pixillation. The results have not always been successful, but they are always interesting.

*Bride of Star* and *Kaleidoscope* are Kivi's strongest works. *Bride of Star* is based on an Estonian folk song

and tells the story of a girl whom both the moon and the sun woo, but in the end she accepts the star. The most intriguing part of the film is the narration, which is all sung, and the incredible backgrounds and designs that are all made from rope and fabric materials.

*Kaleidoscope* uses coloured shards of glass to document the evolution of the planet from random motion of objects that transform eventually into more stable, predictable and recognizable natural and human shapes.

Since independence, Kivi has spent most of his time working with the Estonian National Puppet Theatre, where he works primarily as a theatre set designer.



Riho Unt and Hardi Volmer made *Springfly* early in their partnership.

### THE BROTHERS: RIHO UNT AND HARDI VOLMER

While walking down a hallway at the national Eesti Film Archives, I noticed an old (circa 1980s) photo of two guys, shabbily dressed, toasting each other. They looked like mirror reflections of one another: similar suit, beard and glasses. The two men in the picture were Riho Unt and Hardi Volmer. Not surprisingly, the similarities between the two went beyond their looks, they were school friends and artistic partners on a number of animation films. They were so close that often they were referred to as 'brothers.'

Kalju Kivi told Unt of a vacancy at the studio. Unt applied, was hired and started work as an animator on Kivi's film, *Knot* (1983). "I didn't enjoy the experience," says Unt, "I was an interior designer forced to work as an animator." Nevertheless, Unt stayed and within a year was making his first animation film.

Hardi Volmer came to animation through Unt. "Riho

suggested that we make a film together because there was really good timing for us. The old gang was tired and ready to go and there was a hole and they needed new young filmmakers. Otherwise it could be complicated to go to work in a studio as a director immediately. You usually had to work step by step."

"They sort of trusted us," says Unt, "and trust was a very dubious thing in those days, but they knew Hardi and I had worked together and they let us make a film."

With their first film, *Wonderful New Year's Eve* (1984), Volmer and Unt set out to make a nice Christmas story, even though Christmas was something you couldn't really mention in Soviet time. To get around it, they used an older Estonian word that translated as New Year instead of Christmas.

**NAIL CONSISTS OF FOUR SHORT COMICAL STORIES DEALING WITH SUCH DECIDEDLY SAUCY TOPICS AS SEDUCTION, BETRAYAL, DRUNKENNESS AND THE EVER-COMICAL DEATH.**

*Wonderful New Year's Eve* showed that Volmer and Unt worked well as a team. "We were both designers and directors and script writers, but it worked," says Volmer. "We are very similar but we also fill each other's gaps."

"We were in sync," adds Unt, "and it was more comforting to work together. Every film started from an idea so we sat together, made a storyboard together, but then had to decide what each of us would do...because it made no sense to duplicate everything but we shared the basic things."

Like the early days, Nukufilm was full of fresh new faces; as such there was a lot of positive energy at the studio. "The studio was out of the city almost in a forest," says Volmer, "and everyday we took a special Tallinnfilm bus to the countryside. There was nothing but nature around. The whole group was really close and it was a lovely feeling to work in such an environment."

The 'brothers' started on their next film, *Enchanted Island* (1985), almost immediately. This time they went outside of Estonia for their source material. "We were reading these North Siberian/Iberian fairytales. The stories were really very crazy and non-linear. We were used to concrete fairytales but we saw something different."

*Enchanted Island* was their first film shown in the West, when it was accepted at the Annecy festival. "Riho and I had never even been to Finland at this time. It was very exciting to see these films and there

was so much. I think this was when *Street of Crocodiles* played [by The Brothers Quay] and after we saw this we thought, 'Oh, what shit we are doing at home.'

Following the funny and philosophical, *Springfly* (1986), the 'brothers' made *The War* (1988). A small bat occupies an abandoned factory. He goes about his life in peace, disturbing no one. Then one day, some rats arrive and begin taking over the building and disrupting the bat's life. Another day, crows arrive and do the same. Finally, the rats and crows fight each other and in turn destroy the bat's home. The parallel to the German-Russian occupation of Estonia during the early 1940s is obvious, but the strength of *The War* is the universality of its message. This could, and has, happened anywhere.



The "brothers" Unt and Volmer continued their collaboration with *The War* (1988), their fourth film together.

*The War* was the 'brothers' fourth collaboration together and while they 'reunited' to make two more films neither is up to the standard of this quartet of earlier works. "It was a natural development," says Unt, "at a certain moment we developed different ways. At the beginning we were beginners in animation so the interest to create something new kept us together."

"During the first few films we did everything together," says Volmer, "because everything was discussed between us. But as time went on differences started to develop and from that point on it wasn't so easy."

Since independence, Unt has been the more successful of the two in animation. Volmer has had his hands in animation, theatre and cinema, and while he's had success with feature films it seems that he has not been able to duplicate that in animation. His solo animation shorts are all interesting but hindered by technical and conceptual weaknesses.

IT BECAME CLEAR THAT TUGANOV ALONE COULD NOT MAINTAIN ENOUGH OF A WORKLOAD TO KEEP EVERYONE EMPLOYED.

### UNT GOES SOLO

Unt spent the 1990s preoccupied with his 'Samuel' Trilogy: *Cabbagehead* (1993), *Back to Europe* (1997) and *Samuel's Internet* (2000). *Cabbagehead* is based on a popular Estonian play written at the turn of the century by playwright, Oskar Lutso. Updated for contemporary audiences (and influenced by the films *Raiders of The Lost Ark* and *It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World*), *Cabbagehead* centres on Samuel, a stubborn farmer who steals his neighbour's gigantic cabbage in the hopes of winning top prize (five roubles) at the state fair. Word gets out about Samuel's cabbage and soon every country wants a piece of it.

While *Cabbagehead* clearly addresses issues of Estonian independence (i.e., everyone will want a piece of Estonia), the film is of more interest for its obvious commercial ambitions. Unt contends that artistic factors were secondary: "We were consciously trying to make something more commercial." Unfortunately, Unt had never seen any of England's Aardman Animations' stop-motion films. In comparison, *Cabbagehead*, despite a strong script and animation, is a decidedly primitive film that pales next to the smooth, professional look of Aardman's work.

More importantly, *Cabbagehead* suggested a new reality for Estonian animation: a commercial marketplace. "You have to think more of the audience these days and you have to work harder and be more precise about what you are doing," says Unt. "In the Soviet times, you could pour all of your stress and problems into your metaphoric work. These days you can't do that anymore. The financial side requires different thinking. In those days, you didn't have to worry about where the money was coming from. These days your story has to be good and well thought out." Clearly, *Cabbagehead* signalled a new era for Estonian animators.

### FREEDOM?

Rewind: On August 20, 1991, Estonia became an independent country again. But while freedom arrived, Moscow money departed. When Tallinnfilm (the state film production studio, which produced everything from features to shorts to documentaries) stopped receiving funding in 1994, the Nukufilm and Joonisfilm (a sister department under the Tallinnfilm umbrella that concentrated on cel animation, as opposed to puppet animations) divisions were re-established as independent studios under the control of their animators and producers. Nukufilm re-opened under the charge of pro-



Riho Unt continued his animation career with the solo film *Cabbagehead*. For the first time in Estonian animation, the audience's reaction and the commercial marketplace were important considerations.

ducer Arvo Nuut and animators Rao Heidmets, Kalju Kivi, Hardi Volmer and Riho Unt.

"We began to wonder what would happen to Nukufilm and what we should do," says Arvo Nuut. "I had a lot of energy and started to suggest that we should get some money and continue to work as a private company. I had made over seventy films and maybe I'd gotten to the point where I was a bit bored with it." In 1994, Nuut's new challenge would be taking over as the producer and administrator of the 'new' Nukufilm, in partnership with Heidmets, Kivi, Volmer and Unt.

Led by this team, Nukufilm made out just fine during the 1990s, continuing to produce a wide-range of personal films (including the brilliant Mati Kütt films *Smoked Sprat Baked in the Sun*, 1992, and *Underground*, 1997) and even co-producing a few children's productions. During this time, the studio also added some new faces in Mait Laas and [Mikk Rand](#), who along with [Priit Tender](#) made the acclaimed film *The Crow and Mice* in 1998. Laas in particular has proven to be a valuable addition to Nukufilm.

In 1997, Laas was given the opportunity to make his first professional film, *Daylight*. From a technical standpoint, *Daylight* (a story about a group of kids in a neighbourhood block) stands out immediately. Its mixed-media technique with photocopied heads (which in close-ups look like the dirty, grainy expressionist faces of Eisenstein's staircase victims in *Battleship Potemkin*) on 3D wire bodies is eye-catching and innovative.

Conceptually, *Daylight* is almost an anomaly for a young artist. It's actually a positive film. There is no loud rebellious scream against society, just an innocent, hippie induced call for love, light and peace.

Laas' most recent film, *Way To Nirvana* (2000), is another visually striking film, this time about a young man riding what appears to be a death train with many elderly passengers. The film is filled with a wealth of symbols as the young man seemingly strives to find what he has been missing in his life. *Nirvana* was awarded the prestigious short film award at the 2000 Oberhausen Festival (which primarily caters to live-action films).

### THE STUDIO HAS SHOWN A REMARKABLE FLEXIBILITY IN ADAPTING TO THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM.

Beyond filmmaking, Laas has also become an important part of Nukufilm's future. He is a constant fixture in the studio and has been working on TV pilots with the hope of landing Nukufilm a regular series. In December 2001, Laas was made a partner in Nukufilm.

### A NEW WORLD, NEW CHALLENGES

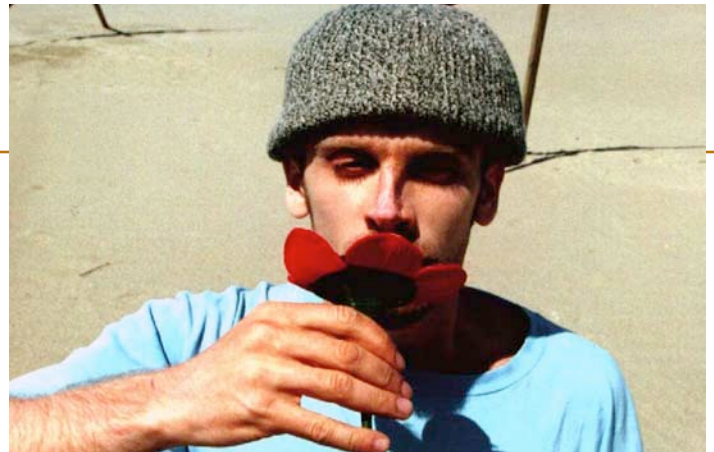
Given the collapse in production and/or quality in other ex-Soviet occupied countries, the Nukufilm story is an unqualified success. Not only has their independent animation production continued, but it's also maintained the same high level of quality (as evidenced by the numerous awards and prizes presented to the work over the last decade) of Soviet times. Furthermore, given the total lack of business experience, the studio has shown a remarkable flexibility in adapting to the capitalist system.

However, life at Nukufilm hasn't been all roses. "I have to say that the beginning of independence was a really hard time economically for everyone," says Hardi Volmer. "It's complicated still because this period of changing systems is still going on and that's hard and mostly it's nasty in a political and economical way."

"In Soviet time," adds Arvo Nuut, "the topic always had to be hidden and this was fascinating because when someone asked you about your works you could give another answer. Today we can talk about anything and some artists didn't know what to say anymore. But later on after some years things have somehow settled down. Artists are once again looking at human relations and general themes, so life is developing again."

Despite its miracle economy, Estonia as a country has also suffered through a lot of economic uncertainty.

Westerners might believe that Estonians (and other ex-Soviet occupied realms) would just be thankful to have freedom, but that view is faulty. Certainly there is a different form of freedom, but is there more freedom? Now you can fly anywhere, if you have money. Now there is no menacing Russian bureaucracy, but there are new invaders called multinational corporations with subtler forms of censorship. One look at the stifling



Mait Laas' work is filled with visually arresting images, as in *Way to Nirvana*.

homogenizing characteristics of 'global culture' clearly shows that differences of opinion are still not entirely encouraged or welcomed. And now Estonia is doing all it can, it seems, to win the favour of the European Union. But as Riho Unt's *Back to Europe* suggests, what is the difference between this Union and the Soviet Union? Are not Estonia's culture, language and resources still at risk of being assimilated by outside countries?

The choice of Heidmets, Kivi, Unt, Volmer and now Laas, has been a fortuitous one. All are heavily involved in a variety of artistic and cultural fields in Estonia today and have all had international success with their films. Certainly it has been hard on Nukufilm. Unt is the only one consistently visible at Nukufilm. With limited funding, there are only so few opportunities to make films. Volmer has been busy in theatre; Heidmets with live-action films and television production; and Kivi with puppet theatre work. In 2002-03, Heidmets and Volmer will be making their first puppet films in many years.

The fragmentation of Nukufilm has hurt the studio to some degree, but on the other hand the scattered nature of the studio has ensured that a wide array of voices are given the chance to be heard. The result is that Nukufilm has no single aesthetic style like the [Priit Pärn](#) 'style' that Joonisfilm might be said to possess.

That being said, Riho Unt has become the creative backbone of Nukufilm. He is a focussed and generous artist. When he's not working on his own films, he's actively tutoring a number of young aspiring animation artists just as Tuganov and Pars did before him. By sharing his experience and knowledge that he himself acquired in part through Tuganov and Pars, Unt is like a bridge linking the young animators with the 'grandfathers.' And yet during this process, he is acquiring new ways of thinking and seeing from his younger colleagues. Nukufilm is a fine example of how the Estonian animation oral tradition has maintained an active dialogue between past and present.

For any animation studio to survive 45 years is exceptional, but consider what Nukufilm has confronted and overcome: a variety of obstacles, from a lack of formal animation training to the cruel absurdities of both Soviet censorship and globalization. That Nukufilm has consistently produced an innovative, varied and internationally acclaimed body of work is miraculous. ■

To purchase [Contemporary Estonian Animation videos](#), please visit the AWN Store.

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**CHRIS J. ROBINSON** is the artistic director of the Ottawa International Animation Festival and the Ottawa International Student Animation Festival. He is also the editor of the semi-annual ASIFA Magazine. Robinson has curated film programs and served on festival juries throughout the world. He writes a monthly column ("[The Animation Pimp](#)") for Animation World Network and has written for Salon.com, Cinemascope, Take One, 12gauge, City Pages and others. Robinson contributed a chapter on English-Canadian animation to the book, *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980*. His book *Between Genius and Utter Illiteracy: A Story of Estonian Animation* will be published in May. He is currently at work on a strange book about childhood, alcoholism and an ex-hockey player tentatively called *The Boy Who Never Grew Up*.

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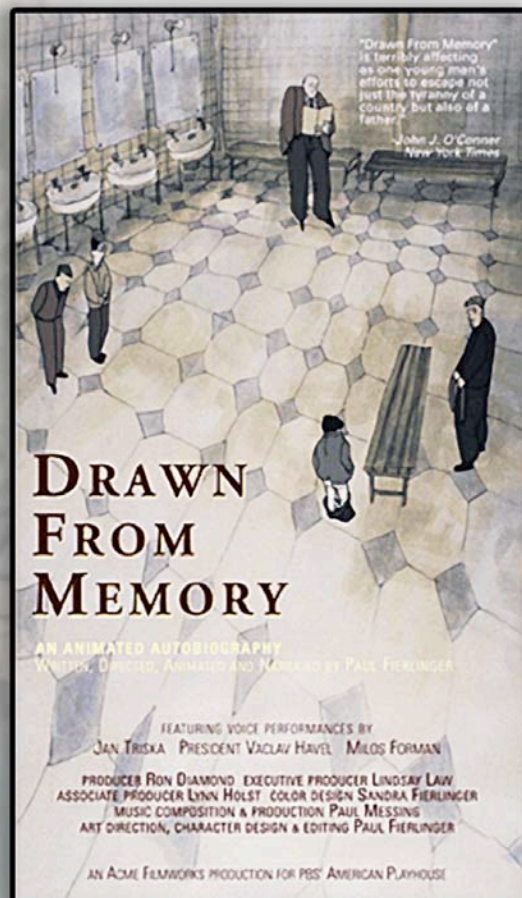
## Paul Fierlinger's DRAWN FROM MEMORY Now Available on Video!

"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>

CAREER COACH

# Creating A Personal Business Plan

by Pamela Kliebrink Thompson



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HETHER YOU ARE AN EMPLOYEE OR an independent contractor/freelancer, you are a one-person business that provides a service. To be sure that your business will prosper you need a business plan.

Business plans are not only for companies like ILM or Disney. A business plan can help you to reach your goals. It can provide a strategy to guide your career.

A business plan is a map to help you get where you want to go. It helps you plan your future. It gives you focus, motivation and objectivity and will keep you on track. It's a personal and objective plan of attack detailing the steps you will take to launch or re-launch and then maintain your career. Your business plan will help you stay focused on your long-term goals.

To create a business plan, first think about who you are and where you want to be. Establish primary, achievable goals for yourself that you are capable of reaching on your own. Set five to ten realistic goals. What do you want to accomplish? Write goals down, then plan the tasks and activities you will do each week to achieve them.

A business plan is a week by week breakdown of what you intend to accomplish. Schedule your classes, lunches, etc. Be specific. Write down your assignments, tasks and commitments to yourself.

A BUSINESS PLAN IS A MAP TO HELP YOU GET WHERE YOU WANT TO GO.

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## YOUR BUSINESS PLAN SHOULD REFLECT YOUR GREATEST CAREER ASPIRATIONS AND HOW YOU INTEND TO GET THERE.

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A sample business plan might look like this:

### GOALS:

1. New demo reel.
2. Review and revise resume.
3. Research info for target companies.
4. Draft cover letter for marketing materials.
5. Become consistent at reading trades, related sources and Websites.

### TASKS:

#### Week One

1. Look at friends' demo reels.
2. Call editors who edited demo reels I like and find out their fees and what they include. Schedule a session.
3. Write a first draft of resume. Look at friends' resumes and resumes in books and on Websites to get formatting ideas. Reformat resume to make it easy to read.
4. Make sure answering machine is working and outgoing message is professional and clear.

#### Week Two

1. Assemble a mailing list of appropriate companies to send new marketing materials to. Include phone numbers on target list.
2. Compose cover letter to be sent with new marketing materials.
3. Review portfolio. Remove any old pieces and assess whether new pieces need to be added.
4. Edit demo reel.
5. Create demo reel breakdown.
6. Attend local SIGGRAPH meeting.

#### Week Three

1. Call every targeted company to see if they are accepting reels, portfolios and resumes. Check spelling of names and addresses of people you are targeting.
2. Make sure all marketing materials have current contact information on them, including reel breakdown list.
3. Attend a software user group meeting.
4. Follow up with any leads from SIGGRAPH meeting. (Send notes to speakers and other people you've met.)

#### Week Four

1. Implement mailing and keep track of where every submission goes.
2. Plan a schedule of telephone follow ups for next week. (Make sure company received your submission.)
3. Follow up with any leads from user group meeting.
4. Attend Women in Animation meeting.

#### Every week:

1. Read the trades (*Daily Variety*, *Hollywood Reporter*) and related Websites ([www.awn.com](http://www.awn.com), [www.highend3d.com](http://www.highend3d.com), [www.animationmagazine.net](http://www.animationmagazine.net), etc.) regularly to keep up on the business and on who is doing what. You can do this in the library.
2. Read other resources and publications every week (*Animation Magazine*, *Cinefx*, etc.).
3. Maintain a database of the contacts made during meetings that week. Include new contacts to pursue and leads to follow up on. Follow up on at least two leads per week, whether obtained through networking or reading.
4. Submit self for everything appropriate.

The business plan will give you a record of the tasks you have accomplished and help highlight the new tasks you need to undertake to reach your goals.

Your business plan should reflect your greatest career aspirations and how you intend to get there. It must be realistic and affordable to implement and full of ideas that will translate into your personal road map to success.

Follow your business plan with diligence and it will lead you to the work you want and build the career you desire. Success can be yours but it is up to you. You are the one person who can help you most in your career. Your business plan will help you make the commitment and keep the promises to yourself. ■

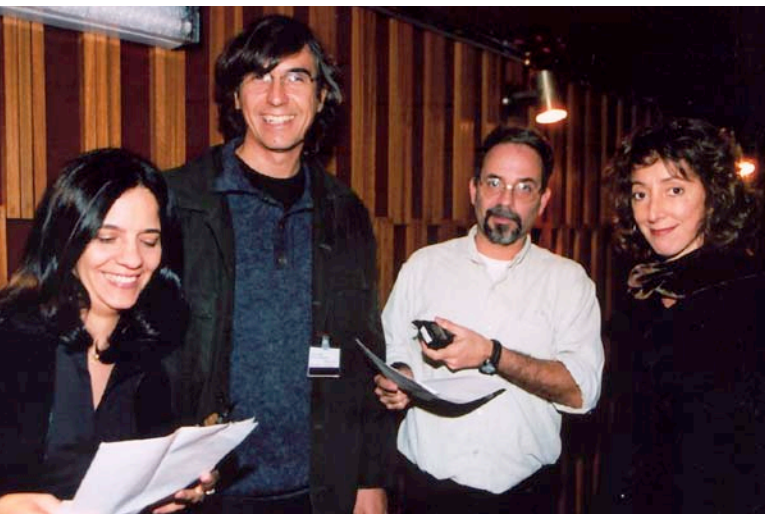
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**PAMELA KLIEBRINK THOMPSON** is a career coach, recruiter and hiring strategist who helps clients to achieve their dreams in their personal and professional lives. Recruiting clients include Disney, Fox, Framestore, Digital Domain, Big Idea Productions and Simex Digital Studios.

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Michaela Pavlátová designed the poster for this year's Anima Mundi festival, which takes in Rio from July 11-20 and in São Paulo from July 23-27. Courtesy of Anima Mundi.



Anima Mundi's festival directors in 2002 were (left to right): Aida Queiroz, Marcos Magalhães, Cesar Coelho and Lea Zagury. Courtesy of Anima Mundi. Photo credit: Juvenal Pereira.

BLAME RIO

# Anima Mundi: A Decade of Memories

by Darlene Chan

**A**N IDEAL TRIP IS TO TRAVEL TO RIO DE JANEIRO, WHILE A dream excursion is when you're invited as a guest speaker to Anima Mundi, the annual celebration of life and animation in Rio de Janeiro. This year [Anima Mundi](#) prepares to commemorate its 11th year as an important animation festival. We asked 16 would-be cariocas about their experience as guest speakers there. Even the most taciturn artists waxed long and poetic when thinking back on their time in the cidade maravilhosa. Animators we contacted were also afraid they might have missed the deadline. (It's Monday, March 31st!) There's something about Rio that makes these artists jump to share their adventures and memories. Talking about it allows them to recapture the joy and sensual rhythms of their once-in-a-lifetime experience. If you read between the lines, you might even hear the beat of the samba in their words.

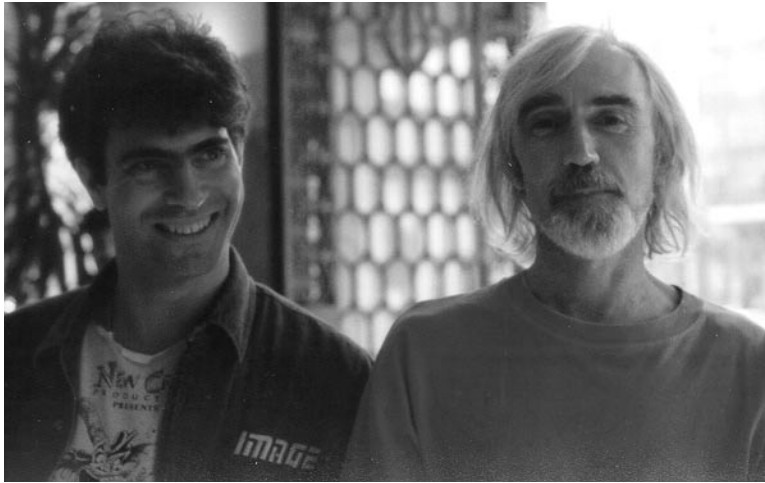
1993

**DAVID SILVERMAN**

Formerly the supervising animation director for *The Simpsons*, David co-directed [Monsters, Inc.](#) Currently, he is consulting for various companies while considering his next project.

So, what can I tell you about Anima Mundi 1993? I met Lea Zagury at a [CalArts](#) event and she invited me! At the time I was supervising director on *The Simpsons*, and spent most of my time at work — day and night. So, a trip to Rio was a real eye opener.

Highlights: I got to hang out with the brilliant Paul Driesen, who is as great a guy as he is a talent. New friends Lea Zagury and Marcos Magalhães took me to Sugar Loaf, to the big Christo, and to many dinners that blur together now, thanks to alcohol. I'd say the biggest thrill was doing the lecture about *The Simpsons*, and the overwhelming response I received. It was the first time that I got a sense of the show's impact around the world. I think I was interviewed by Brazil's MTV, but, well, my memory's fuzzy! I do recall meeting a young Brazilian voice actor who did work dubbing *The Simpsons*. He sounded just like Skinner — talking in Portuguese!



David Silverman (top left) cherished the time he spent with fellow guest speaker Paul Driessen (top right) in 1993. Courtesy of Anima Mundi. Bill Plympton (bottom left) was impressed by the enthusiasm of the youth when he visited nine years ago. Hiroshima International Animation Festival director Sayoko Kinoshita (bottom right) fell into the warm embrace of Rio after her long flight from Japan.

**1994**

#### **BILL PLYMPTON**

*Bill Plympton is an award-winning independent animator based in New York. His next feature, Hair High, is now in production. All of his drawings for this film can be viewed live at [www.hairhigh.com](http://www.hairhigh.com).*



The highlight of Anima Mundi for me was meeting with the young animation students after the screenings. They were so positive and eager to learn. I could see my younger self in their faces. It was a wonderful experience.

**1995**

#### **SAYOKO KINOSHITA**

*Founder of the Hiroshima International Animation Festival in 1985, animation film director/producer Sayoko Kinoshita has been the festival director ever since. She also serves as vice-president of ASIFA, president of ASIFA-Japan, president of the ASIFA Workshop Group and is special advisor to the Japan Society of Animation Studies.*

#### **PAUL DRIESSEN**

*Nominated for a Genie Award for Best Animated Short for The Boy Who Saw the Iceberg, Dutch-born animator Paul Driessen has worked with the NFB since the early '70s. In 2000, he was nominated for an Oscar for his independent short 3 Misses. He is currently working on an animated short 2D or Not 2D with fellow Anima Mundi alumni Marcy Page co-producing.*

Ah, my first (the first) Anima Mundi. Never been away from home so far in such a welcoming family. Drinking *caipirinha* at the special cafe and (watching) all the elegant Brazilians dancing the tango at the Lapa, and the beautiful beaches (I grew up with beaches) are still very prominent in my memories.

But also the idea that it was dangerous to stop at traffic lights impressed me with the notion that this was quite a wild country.

However, the sold-out screenings full with excited people and the small devoted group of organizers are my fondest memories.

Congratulations on the 11th Anniversary of Anima Mundi!

Staying at a beautiful cozy hotel nearby the coast of Copacabana, surrounded by so many smiles of the audience satisfied with the world's wonderful animation art, I felt I was glad to be in Rio, after such a long, long flight from Japan. A festival where you can experience a happiness of life with animation art as your best friend — that is Anima Mundi. All of this is made possible only by the great efforts of the festival staff working backstage, always with cheerful enthusiasm.

The whole world is suffering economic depression and Brazil is not an exception, and thus, I deeply appreciate all the people at Anima Mundi for continuing the festival while coping with these difficulties.

Personally speaking, I love enjoying *caipirinha* with the festival staff, feeling the slightly bitter taste of the ocean breeze, as my body naturally takes in the rhythm of samba...it made me feel like staying there forever!

Anima Mundi is a festival you want to participate in again and again.

THE GENEROSITY OF THE ANIMA TEAM ALLOWED ME TO  
DISCOVER RIO DE JANEIRO'S SPLENDORS...  
— FRÉDÉRIC BACK



Festival director Lea Zagury (left) relaxes with animator Alexander Petrov and his wife, Natalia Petrova. Courtesy of Anima Mundi. Marv Newland found time to sketch this drawing of Sugarloaf between adventures in 1998. © 2003 Marv Newland.



### FRÉDÉRIC BACK

Canadian animation legend Frédéric Back is now celebrating his 57th anniversary as an illustrator and his 32nd year as an animator. His work has won many awards including the Academy Award for *The Man Who Planted Trees* (*L'Homme qui plantait des arbres*) in 1988 and an Oscar nomination for *The Mighty River* (*Le Fleuve aux grandes eaux*) in 1993.

To be invited to Rio de Janeiro by the Anima Mundi Festival was amazing! It is a unique place where nature and people have created spectacular and dramatic contrasts!

The generosity of the Anima team allowed me to discover Rio de Janeiro's splendors and meet with young Brazilian animators, eager to show their works and to learn ways to succeed in this difficult field of production. The festival was really a heaven of friendship and creativity via participation in the "Animathon" and the quality of comments about the screenings.

There is much more to say but I want to express my admiring gratitude to Aida Querioz, Marcos Magalhães and their perseverant friends who succeeded in making Anima Mundi become a yearly and traditional event in Rio and São Paulo, providing discovery and stimulation to the many fans and creators of ani-

mation in Brazil!

Many thanks and happy 11th anniversary!

### 1996

#### WILLIAM MORITZ

A member of the CalArts Film and Video faculty, [William Moritz](#) pursues parallel careers as filmmaker and writer. His 44 experimental and animation films have screened at museums worldwide and he has been published widely on animation history.

Anima Mundi was so wonderful that it is hard to choose just one thing as a favorite memory. Rio and the Corcovado, the exotic fruits like açaí, meeting Aurora Miranda to chat about her time at Disney (and the Carmen Miranda Museum)...But if I did have to choose, I think the most impressive memory was of the animator Fernando Diniz and his film [Eight-Pointed Star](#). I remember how he was wheeled into the auditorium in a wheelchair, and how sweetly and modestly he said how nice it was to be out of the asylum. Then they screened his wonderful film and he was wheeled away again. I bought a copy of the film, and have showed it every year to my animation students. It stands up very well — and makes me sigh at the memory of Anima Mundi.

The women of Brazil made a lasting impression on Marv Newland of International Rocketship Limited.  
© 2003 Marv Newland.



**1997**

#### **CAROLINE LEAF**

*Caroline Leaf has been based in London for the last three years, mostly working on her painting. She teaches part time at Konstfack in Sweden, and is currently animating a commissioned film for [Acme Film-works](#) in Los Angeles.*

I have many vivid memories of visiting Anima Mundi in Rio de Janeiro and of that memorable city. One night our generous hosts took the guests of the festival out to dinner and then to a club for dancing. The evening was still very warm. I remember driving up into hills and around twisting small roads, and then stepping through an old wooden fence and into a small leafy garden under the stars. The band played and people got up from their tables singly or in groups and danced samba. I watched Lea samba, and fell in love with the dance, I, who cannot dance.

All the next year back in Boston I went weekly to the Brazilian Cultural Center in Central Square, in a grey industrial part of town, and took samba lessons.

**1998**

#### **MARV NEWLAND**

*Vancouver resident Marv Newland makes animated movies through International Rocketship Limited and provides designs and directs animation for other companies on a freelance basis. In April 2003, Cinematheque Québécoise will present a retrospective of International Rocketship films in Montreal.*

It was a journey full of exotic wonders, warm hearted, spirited audiences and generous hosts. I have many memories of Anima Mundi, however, legal and moral issues related to most of the activities engaged in during the festival in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo limit me to mention only the following:

At the first evening screening Marcos Magalhães, one of the four directors of Anima Mundi, presented a beautifully crafted 3D puppet which danced when you turned a wire crank built into the copper half globe upon which the puppet was mounted. He gave it to one of the other guests, Georges Lacroix. Was this a prize for best film produced by a guest of the festival? Was this some wonderful gift of appreciation for a trust fund set up by Georges on behalf of Anima Mundi? I was barely able to get to sleep that night thinking about the fine trophy.

A day later I forgot all about the prize as festival director Marcos took us surfing in his vintage VW bug. When we drove away from the Copacabana hotel the remaining three festival directors waved goodbye and wept openly into cocktail napkins. (Other international animation festivals should take note here as to how to display hospitality toward their guests.)

I drank something called *garota de Ipanema*, a kind of white wine served in a heavy coffee mug. I ate *quindim* a custard baked in a hollowed out custard cup and served upside down on a plate. I drank *caipirinha*, a large glass goblet full of sliced tropical fruits and a cold, clear fluid. After a few of these they say in Portuguese, roughly translated here into English, "You look like you just came out of a cow's mouth."

The festival provided me with a driver, Cardoso, and a translator, Fernanda, who drove me to among other places, Prainha, a famous Brazilian surfing beach. Cardoso hung out at the chop hut (beer joint) watching satellite TV and Fernanda kept her cell phone active in case she had to organize rescue operations for me, or Cardoso.

On the Brazilian beaches men wear chop (beer) logos printed directly on the crotch area of their swim suits, and I purchased postage stamps larger than many of the bikinis worn by the women in Rio.

Back in the theatres, the Anima Mundi audiences were enthusiastic and appreciative. In Rio and São Paulo there were requests for autographs and drawings of



Joanna Quinn sketched these scenes from Anima Mundi 1999. Renderings of Janno Poldma (center image: left) and Paul Bush. Joanna Quinn captures Jacques-Rémy Girerd (bottom image: left) and Chris J. Robinson in Rio. © Joanna Quinn.

obscure background characters from a couple of my films. They pay close attention. After the screening of International Rocketship films, the festival directors presented one of the precious dancing-on-the-globe puppet trophies to me. The presented these extraordinary gifts to each festival guest as if being invited to Brazil were not in itself quite enough. Anima Mundi is a top-notch festival in every department. I only wish I could tell you about the most memorable aspects of this animation extravaganza...

### 1999 ERIC DARNELL

A director at PDI/DreamWorks in Redwood City, California, Eric helmed the animated feature [Antz](#), and is currently directing the animated feature film *Madagascar*, due out in 2005.

There are so many wonderful things about Anima Mundi — so many experiences that I will never forget — but the warm, friendly and talented people that I met and got to know will always shape my fondest memories.

### JOANNA QUINN

A native of Birmingham, England, Joanna's first film *Girls Night Out* (1987) won three awards at the Annecy Film Festival and [Famous Fred](#) (1998) and [The Canterbury Tales](#) (1999) received Academy Awards nominations. Joanna is known for her work in commercials, short films, title sequences, book illustrations and teaching.

My favorite memory was a night out in Rio when we went to an antique shop which turned bar by night. It was great lounging around on splendid furniture, drinking beer and watching people sambaing carefully around the ornate tables and chairs. Here are some sketches I did whilst I was in Brazil. Notice everybody is laughing. It was absolutely brilliant!

### JACQUES-RÉMY GIRERD

Based in Valence, France, Jacques-Rémy Girerd founded and directs for the prestigious [Folimage](#) studio. His short film [Charlie's Christmas](#) won the Cartoon d'Or in 1998 and was nominated for an Emmy. His full-length animated film, [The Prophecy of the Frogs](#), will be released this year.

The friends of Anima Mundi are incredible; they're welcoming and truly sincere people. We all, at Folimage, adore them. Their simplicity, friendship and quest for quality are strong values in the animation world. We love you!

2000

**IAIN HARVEY**

*Following a career in publishing, Iain Harvey entered the world of animation as executive producer of The Snowman. In 1993 he formed The Illuminated Film Company and produced such award-winning projects as The Very Hungry Caterpillar & Other Stories, [T.R.A.N.S.I.T.](#), [Christmas Carol: The Movie](#) and [War Game](#).*

Nights in Rio — even in ‘winter’ — are for relaxing: music, friendship — and dare I say it — drinking! The superb hospitality of the Anima Mundi Festival allowed us to explore many aspects of Brazilian culture but as always it is the unexpected that yields the greatest pleasure. Joining Normand Roger and Marcy Page on our last evening, I was left with memories that will last as long as I have a zest for life!

We went to one of the many bars scattered around the city. This particular one did not seem to have any special distinguishing features, and I doubt if I would find it again, but once we entered we sensed something special. It was packed in a way that added to your pleasure rather than crushed it. Somehow you could slide around people, find seats, and get drinks with no delays or hindrance. Even though people were absorbed in their friends’ company, we still felt welcome. We had been taken to the bar by a local contact of Normand’s, who had heard of this excellent band. I went along for the ride.

**ANIMA MUNDI HAS ANIMATION HAPPENING OUT IN THE OPEN ALL DAY AND HUNGRY CROWDS QUEUING UP TO TAKE PART.**

— PETER LORD

There were four musicians, and though I was not familiar with the style of music, it was infectious, brilliant and unmistakably Brazilian. Quickly we became absorbed in the mood of the night: a couple danced — sensuously and oblivious to those watching and listening. I don’t mind admitting I was jealous — no way could I ever have moved like that; it was instinctive and as if from the floating world.

I stood by an open window, enjoying the warmth of the night air, the sounds, the movement and the colors — the various shades of ochre that the houses opposite were painted in. Time actually did seem frozen for a while. I didn’t want the evening to end — I wanted to remain forever in Rio!



**Marcy Page's oil painting, *Abraçando o Jacaré*, recalls the night she, Iain Harvey and Normand Roger visited a club with a *chorinho* band and watched a couple dance with abandon. Iain stands by the open window. © M. Page.**

**MARCY PAGE**

*A native northern Californian, Marcy Page has pursued animation for almost 25 years. She freelanced as an animator for companies in the San Francisco Bay area and also taught animation production and related classes before immigrating to Canada. She has been producing animation for the National Film Board of Canada since 1990.*

It was truly amazing to see what these organizers had been able to achieve in Brazil on behalf of this art form with their idealism and their passion. Thousands and thousands of Brazilians in Rio and São Paulo see the films of this festival — the numbers are truly impressive. It is a festival that is almost completely turned toward the public seemingly with an evangelical mission of raising consciousness about this art form. The prizes are all “public prizes,” which serves to invest the audiences with an increased sense of involvement, responsibility and ownership of this art. In addition to the screenings, I also witnessed hundreds of young people lining up each day to do the “pixillation,” clay animation and computer animation exercises. I also met young Brazilian animators who were presenting their first, independent animated films at the festival whose initial exposure to animation techniques had been through these very same festival workshops in previous years. Indeed it became clear that the number of Brazilian submissions to the festival had increased exponentially in the years that the festival was operating. Create an animation festival and the animation will come.

The finest night of all was our last night in Rio de Janeiro when we went to see Roberto Santa Marta, a



Michaela Pavlátová, seen in the photo above, shooting *Unava pro dva* (*Lassitude for Two*), turned down a marriage proposal from the audience at Anima Mundi 2001. *Happy William* (bottom) is the Flash animation on which she's presently working. *Unava pro dva* © Negativ S.R.O 2003. Photo credit: V. Polak; *Happy William* © Michaela Pavlátová, 2003.

young musician and aspiring animator, play with his band in a small club. Lulu Farha, who was lending his sound studio and technical wizardry to Normand Roger's sound workshop at the festival, accompanied Normand, British animation producer Iain Harvey, and myself to the club. (The neighborhood was supposed to be a little "dangerous," but that seemed to only add to our sense of forbidden fruit.) Roberto's band played a type of music called *chorinho*. The name we were told means "little tear" but despite the connotation of blues in the name, the music was so incredibly lively that the club was rocking on its foundation. There was one incredible set of dancers dancing in a *gafieira* style that seemed to cross French café dips and swings with a gypsy

abandon...fantastic. Roberto's fingers moved so fast on his bandolin as to defy belief. It was positively transcendent. When we all finally came to a landing and I asked Roberto what the name of his group, *Abraçando o Jacaré*, meant, he said that the name literally means "to hug a crocodile." He smiled (a very beautiful smile) and further explained that, "To play *chorinho* is very, very hard...like hugging a crocodile." Such is Brazil.

May the festival have an easy time with its own embrace of the next decade. Happy anniversary.

## 2001

### MICHAELA PAVLÁTOVÁ

Born in Prague, Czech Republic, Michaela originally worked as an animation director (Words, words, word), and then combined animation with documentary film (*On Grandma*) before directing a live-action feature (*Double Solitude*). When she discovered how real actors don't obey, she returned to Flash animation and is in production on *Lassitude for Two* (*Unava pro dva*). Michaela's work can be viewed at [www.volny.cz/mpavlatova/show/](http://www.volny.cz/mpavlatova/show/)

The Anima Mundi audience is the best, most active, most spontaneous, most "animated." I enjoyed all of this in the discussion after showing my films. I felt adored like a queen; they let me feel beautiful and intelligent. I think there was also one very cute offer for marriage from the audience. (I was silly I did not accept.) I recommend, if you ever have a problem with self esteem (or want to get married), Anima Mundi will help!

## 2002

### CARLOS SALDANHA

A native carioca, Carlos Saldanha has been part of Blue Sky's creative team since 1993, after finishing his animated short *Time for Love*. Carlos was Blue Sky's supervising animator for the talking and dancing roaches in the feature film Joe's Apartment (1996) and the co-director on Blue Sky's first animated feature film Ice Age (2002).

Anima Mundi has a special meaning to me, because besides being a fantastic event created by an amazing and talented group of artists, it takes place in Rio de Janeiro my hometown, and it's always great to be back home to share my experience with the animation community there. The festival also is incredible because it focuses on all styles of animation as an art form, ranging from experimental work all the way to the latest computer-generated feature films. It's hard to pick the best moment I had there, because there were so many, but last year for the celebration of their tenth anniversary



**The Prodigal Son Returneth:** Carlos Saldanha (left) went back to his hometown as a guest speaker for Anima Mundi 2002. Peter Lord (right) found that Rio fit all his preconceived notions of the good life, plus the audiences and the festival venue added to the happy experience.

sary, as a surprise, we [the guest speakers] were presented with a wonderful handmade puppet-like trophy that actually moved when you turned the crank. This moment was very memorable for me because it was also my birthday. It was a fun celebration!

#### **PETER LORD**

*Peter Lord co-founded Aardman Animations in 1972 and serves as its chairman and managing director. As a director, he has been honored with two Academy Award nominations for Best Animated Short, for *Wat's Pig* (1996) and *Adam* (1992), for which he also received a BAFTA nomination.*

Without doubt there's something strange and distorting about being a "Special Guest" at a festival. On one hand, everyone treats you with incredible kindness and generosity; on the other it's difficult, between general merrymaking, dining, giving interviews and meeting the Mayor, to appreciate the festival as the average attendee might.

But that applies to almost any festival. Anima Mundi, I can report, is distinguished by a particularly warm and generous atmosphere and Rio, as a venue, has a pretty good reputation for the high life. In fact from time to time, while I was there, Rio seemed to me a caricature of itself. What do you expect? Stunning scenery, football on the beach, beautiful people, dancing, music, partying? *Joie de vivre*? Yes. All present and correct. I've seldom been in the company of so many people gently but firmly dedicated to enjoying life.

But, hey, this isn't a plug for Rio, nor yet a recommendation that everyone should go to Anima Mundi as a special guest (nice thought though). So between the

sightseeing, the eating, drinking, dancing and shameless hedonism of it all, what do I remember? Well, two things. First the great audiences. The festival's big screen was in a temporary cinema erected in a square outside the festival headquarters. Whenever I went (not often enough), it was packed with people who seemed genuinely receptive to animated films in all their diversity. The obvious comic crowd pleasers did indeed please the crowd who made plenty of enthusiastic noise to emphasize the point, but the obscure, the abstract and the challenging were also received with real warmth and intelligence, which doesn't happen at all festivals by any means.

And the second memory is simply the National Bank Building, which provides a handsome and spectacular venue for the festival. Some festivals are centered just around cinemas and screenings, some have a club bar, others bookshops and trade stalls. But Anima Mundi has animation happening out in the open all day and hungry crowds queuing up to take part. In one of the main halls, students and volunteers manned cameras and recorders where the general public, very many of them children, could come and try their hand. One group were doing pixillation — children in a variety of fancy dress costumes grew, shrunk, changed sex, flew, skated and disappeared into tiny boxes. Another group, dear to my heart — were producing clay animation, building models and animating them on two or three stages. While a third group were busily drawing flip-books and zoetropes. All in all, the hall was ringing with noise, energy, creativity and fun. It was hard to fight your way through crowds of people not merely sitting and watching but actually making animation. And the long queues of people waiting their turn showed how much desire there was to get involved.

A hugely enjoyable festival certainly, but also a place where tomorrow's animators are being actively encouraged in a marvelous creative atmosphere. ■

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**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 2001, she joined Animation World Magazine. One of her most cherished journeys was a long visit to Brazil ten years ago.

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Attendees of the 2002 Cinanima Festival were characteristically friendly, but cautious about the future of animation in Portugal. All photos © Cinanima unless otherwise noted.

FUNDING FAMINE

# After Espinho, Trouble in Portugal

by Phillipe Moinis

THIS 26TH EDITION OF THE PORTUGUESE ANIMATION FESTIVAL WAS A VERY GOOD-NATURED AFFAIR...HOWEVER THE MOOD OF PORTUGUESE PROFESSIONALS WAS RATHER SOMBER.

**L**OYA TROFIMOVA'S FILM *LE TROP PETIT PRINCE* WON THE Grand Prix at the [Cinanima International Animated Film Festival 2002](#), which took place last November in Espinho. This 26th edition of the Portuguese animation festival was a very good-natured affair, with that combination of unpretentiousness and warmth, which has always been the Espinho festival's hallmark. However the mood of Portuguese professionals was rather somber.

The jury had quite a selection of films to judge, screened in seven separate programs, and including many films of a high artistic standard and which made few concessions to the mainstream. A godsend for a jury composed of artists such as Istvan Orosz, Manuel Otero, Joao Paulo Antunes, Jiri Barta

SINCE THE CASA BEGAN OPERATIONS, GENERAL ELECTIONS HAVE TAKEN PLACE AND THE NEO-CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT CLEARLY HAS LITTLE SYMPATHY WITH THE PROJECT.

and [Mark Baker](#). The general consensus was that this was a vintage selection and the winning films reflected this laudable standard.

### AN OBVIOUS GRAND PRIX

With the Grand Prix going to the [Folimage](#) production *Le Trop Petit Prince*, repeating its recent success at the Annecy, [Ottawa](#) and Hiroshima festivals, the French studio once again consolidated its now dominant lead in animation festival prizewinner lists. Without detracting from the high quality of films bearing the [Folimage](#) logo (and this was a fine one!), the jury's choice probably also reflects a relative shortage of films which dare to take the viewer into truly new territories. In consolation one can tell oneself that in the tide of contemporary TV's general inanity, Trofimova's film provides a real ray of sunshine. These days perhaps that's real audacity. José Miguel Ribeiro was greeted as "local-boy-made-good" and his pre-school series *As Coisas Lá de Casa* (Cartoon Portugal Prize) aroused great hilarity and drew loud applause.

### PROBLEMS IN THE PROFESSION

The Festival daily newspaper was unequivocal in its coverage of the current "famine" within [Portuguese animation](#). At the closing night ceremony, Festival director Antonio Gaio presented a letter to the Ministry of Culture representative, written by the ASIFA Board to express its concern over the fate of animation in Portugal. Apparently all cultural budgets have suffered drastic cuts, and particularly that of ICAM, the state department offshoot which finances more or less all-Portuguese production.

With a very small domestic market and a particularly weak production capacity, Portuguese film has always been dependant on public funding.

The threat hanging over the existence of Porto's new Casa de Animação have since confirmed that Portugal's new policy risks driving its local animation into the ground: only recently opened, the Casa de Animação is a cultural institution initiated by [Abi Feijo](#) and a small team of enthusiasts. Suddenly its future has been seriously jeopardized. In less than two years of operation, it has to its credit a number of conferences, visiting filmmakers and fine retrospectives and/or exhibitions (Swiss animation, [Starewicz](#) and



The 2002 jury was comprised of (left to right): István Orosz (Hungary); Manuel Otero (France); João Antunes (Portugal/ President of the jury); Jiri Barta (Czech Republic) and Mark Baker (United Kingdom).



José Miguel Ribeiro receives the Cartoon Portugal Prize for his pre-school series *As Coisas Lá de Casa* (Home Things). © Zeppelin Filmes.

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AN APPEAL TO THE PORTUGUESE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN LAUNCHED...

Aardman). There was a real will to make Porto, the historic capital of Portuguese cinema, a new center for animation. Valence, France's Folimage and la Poudrière were probably examples it had in mind with this initiative, even though the Casa could in no way rely on the busy production schedule of a studio. Creating the Casa was a bold and difficult undertaking, but one which seemed to have the support of institutions like ICAM. Since the Casa began operations, general elections have taken place and the neo-conservative government clearly has little sympathy with the project. An appeal to the Portuguese government has been launched and Abi Feijo has, along with other artists, created "APRIL" (Regional Political Association of Local Intervention), which aims to lobby political decision-makers. At the time of writing, the Casa's management still do not know if their funding will be

maintained by ICAM over the coming month. Nonetheless they envision some support from local authorities and possible sponsors, but their situation is so precarious that it makes it impossible for them to continue planning their programs. So it is clear that for Portuguese animation overall the situation is very troubled indeed. ■

*Emails of support and questions can be sent to [mail@casa-da-animacao.pt](mailto:mail@casa-da-animacao.pt). For more information about Casa de Animação, visit [www.casa-da-animacao.pt](http://www.casa-da-animacao.pt) (in Portuguese).*

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**PHILIPPE MOINS** is a writer and teacher, and also the co-director of Anima 2003.

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## 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>

# Cowboy Bebop: The Movie... *At Last*

TERRORIST BOUNTY

by Fred Patten

Spike Spiegel leads the hunt for the biggest capture reward ever, but the cowboys might get more than they bargained for from the government.



**COWBOY BEBOP HAS BEEN A CONTROVERSIAL FAVORITE SINCE IT WAS CREATED BY JAPAN'S SUNRISE ANIMATION STUDIO AS AN ADULT TV SERIES FIVE YEARS AGO.**

NINE FANS DO NOT NEED TO BE TOLD HOW GOOD *COWBOY Bebop: The Movie* is; they have been waiting impatiently for almost two years. In fact, fans have been suffering for the past year squinting at blurry bootleg video copies, or wincing at the pidgin-English subtitles on the imported Hong Kong DVD release. Now it is finally coming to American theaters with a superb English dubbing, co-distributed by Destination Films and Samuel Goldwyn Films. The initial release, on April 4th, will be in seventeen major cities across the U.S. If the box office is favorable, this may be expanded.

## HOT, HOT, HOT

*Cowboy Bebop* has been a controversial favorite since it was created by Japan's Sunrise animation studio as an adult TV series five years ago. TV theme popularity tends to come in waves, and late 1997-early 1998 in Japan looked like the time for "space adventure" shows. Two of the better examples that season were Sunrise's *Outlaw Star* (an interstellar Treasure Island) and Madhouse's *Trigun* (a space Western on the planet Gunsmoke).

**COWBOY BEBOP: THE MOVIE FEATURES A DEADLY TERRORIST THREAT INVOLVING MASSIVE EXPLOSIONS AND WHAT APPEARS TO BE THE RELEASE OF AN UNKNOWN BIOPLAGUE...**

*Cowboy Bebop* was not just an average TV anime series for Sunrise. It was one that the entire studio got really enthusiastic over and assigned its top talent to. (*Cowboy Bebop*'s creator-of-record is "Hajime Yatate," Sunrise's well-known house pseudonym for a team effort.) The leader of the creative team was director Shinichiro Watanabe, a fan favorite as the director of the futuristic military adventure series *Macross Plus* and *Mobile Suit Gundam 0083: Stardust Memory*. Watanabe wanted to design not just a space adventure series for adolescent boys but a program that would appeal to sophisticated adults. His main inspiration was the *Lupin III* anime series, which had been mega-popular from the late 1970s through the mid-'80s, about a debonair roguish international jewel thief and his "cool" gang in jet-set locales. They were sympathetic because they preyed upon truly despicable rich villains rather than the innocent.

Other leading members of Sunrise's creative team were scriptwriter Keiko Nobumoto, character designer Toshihiro Kawamoto, mechanical art designer Kimitoshi Yamane, and composer Yoko Kanno. Most of them had worked together before, in addition to having credits on other popular anime titles. Nobumoto had scripted *Macross Plus*, Kawamoto had designed the characters for *Gundam 0083*, and Kanno had written the music for *Macross Plus* (which needed an extremely strong score to support the plot about the rise of a popular singing idol who turns out to be a computer-generated Artificial Intelligence) and *The Vision of Escaflowne*. Yamane had not worked with Watanabe, but his credits included such other anime hits as *Bubblegum Crisis* and *The Vision of Escaflowne*.

The space-adventure update of *Lupin III* that Watanabe's team came up with was a "frontier" interplanetary culture of 2071 A.D. The Solar System has been colonized (forget the American publicity ad copy about humanity spreading "to the stars;" the action is all between Venus and Neptune), but it is a grungy society of mostly bubble-domed small communities on asteroids and the moons of the gas-giant planets, plus artificial space stations. Only Venus and Mars have any large cities. The cultural influences of this space society are as much Chinese as Western. There is a confusing conglomeration of independent governments, alliances and spheres of influence. The only system-wide organizations seem to be a unified police force, the ISSP (Inter Solar System Police), which



*Cowboy Bebop: The Movie* is finally here. The bounty hunters (clockwise from top) Jet Black, Faye Valentine, Edward Wong and Spike Spiegel track terrorists after a bioplague is released. Courtesy of Destination Films and Samuel Goldwyn Films, unless otherwise noted.



Director Shinichiro Watanabe crafted the *Cowboy Bebop* series as an homage to American movies and television. © Bandai Entertainment.



The Spaceship Bebop (above) carries the team on their missions. Spike Spiegel (bottom), one of the first characters introduced in the TV series, also stars in the feature film.

**COWBOY BEBOP ACHIEVED THE UNIQUE RECORD THAT ONLY HALF OF ITS 26 EPISODES WERE CONSIDERED SUITABLE FOR TV BROADCAST DURING ITS INITIAL RUN...**

is widely considered to be corrupt and ineffective; and powerful crime families which combine the worst aspects of the Italian Mafia and the Chinese Triads.

Due to the general helplessness of individual police forces at dealing with anything more serious than local petty crime, most governments have fallen back on posting rewards for the capture of serious criminals. This has created a new occupation of bounty hunters, popularly called "cowboys," who roam the Solar System looking for criminals with big rewards. *Cowboy Bebop* is about one particular "odd couple" team of these cowboys aboard the *Bebop*, a decrepit used spaceship. The core duo, introduced in the first episode, are Spike Spiegel and Jet Black, two macho good buddies who (it turns out from their conversation) only met shortly before deciding to team up and do not really know much about each other's pasts. The next few episodes add the remaining three of the team: Faye Valentine, a *femme fatale* bounty hunter, who alternates between joining their hunts as a partner and competing with them as a rival; "Ed," a young adolescent brilliant computer hacker (technically a she, although Ed is so androgynous that it is easier to think of her as an "it"); and Ein, an apparently normal dog (Welsh Corgi) with cryptic hints of abnormal capabilities. (One of the running gags of the series is leading the audience into trying to catch Ein doing something super-canine.)

### BEBOP HISTORY

The most important of the many elements that made *Cowboy Bebop* so successful is its sophisticated and mature attitude. Watanabe made no secret that, in addition to *Lupin III*, it was largely his tribute to his favorite American movies and TV series, which were shown in Japan during the 1970s and '80s including *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (the relationship between Spike and Jet), anything with Bruce Lee (Spike is a martial-arts fanatic), anything with a blues or jazz sound track, and lots of Blaxploitation movies (the series has a very racially diverse supporting cast). Individual movies from *Alien* to *Midnight Run* were pastiched and parodied. One main attraction was that the audience was always kept guessing over the nature of the next episode. Would it be a comedy, a detective caper, an action thriller, a somber mood piece, which would reveal some more of one of the main cast's past, or something else unexpected. The hot music motif was emphasized in many of the episode titles (in English) such as: "Asteroid Blues," "Honky Tonk Women," "Ballad of Fallen Angels," "Heavy Metal Queen," "Jamming With Edward," "Jupiter Jazz" and "Mushroom Samba."



Faye Valentine plays the *femme fatale* bounty hunter who gives as good as she gets.

The dialogue was kept "clean," but its level of sophistication was appropriate to adults in a criminal milieu. Drug dealing and homosexuality were key elements of some episodes. As a result, *Cowboy Bebop* achieved the unique record that only half of its 26 episodes were considered suitable for TV broadcast during its initial run on the TV Tokyo network as a Friday primetime 6:00 p.m. series (April 3 through June 26, 1998). The remaining 13 episodes were initially available when the whole series was released on video. The entire series was finally shown on TV on the WOWOW satellite channel on Fridays at 1:00 a.m., October 23, 1998 through April 23, 1999. The TV series won awards in Japan including the 3rd Kobe Animation Festival's award in the Best TV Animation category,

and the 2000 annual Japan National Science Fiction Convention's Uchusen SF Award for Best Media science-fiction.

*Cowboy Bebop* has been a similar fan favorite in America. It originally appeared as one of Bandai Entertainment's early anime home video releases, two episodes dubbed or subtitled on thirteen videos between September 1999

**THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THE MANY ELEMENTS THAT MADE *COWBOY BEBOP* SO SUCCESSFUL IS ITS SOPHISTICATED AND MATURE ATTITUDE.**

and October 2000. Anime fans who are often critical of the quality of English dubbing agreed that *Cowboy Bebop's* was one of the best-dubs yet. That was quickly superseded by a bilingual DVD release in six volumes between April and November 2000. The conventional wisdom among anime fans was that *Cowboy Bebop* was too mature to ever appear on American TV. When it did finally show up on The Cartoon Network's new "Adult Swim" block on September 2, 2001 (at 11:30 p.m. EST), the edits and omitted episodes served as new publicity for the uncut DVDs. A fancy *Cowboy Bebop: The Perfect Sessions* complete DVD boxed set was released in November 2001 for not quite \$200. More recently, *Cowboy Bebop: Best Sessions* (November 2002) is a two-disc DVD of the six most popular episodes "reedited and remixed ... under the direct supervision of series director Shinichiro Watanabe." All of this new marketing would not be possible if *Cowboy Bebop* did not continue to be extremely popular.

#### THE BIG SCREEN RELEASE

And now the movie! The TV/DVD series was so popular in Japan that there was never any doubt that there would be a theatrical release. *Cowboy Bebop: Knockin' On Heaven's Door* is crafted by the same "dream team" of creators: "Yatate," Watanabe, Nobumoto, Kawamoto, Yamane and Kanno. The theatrical budget permitted the story to be set in "Alba City, the capital of Mars;" the major human city off Earth. This is the excuse to create a much larger and more detailed metropolitan cityscape than in any of the TV episodes, which blends aspects of New York City, Tokyo and an ethnic Near-Eastern "Morocco Street" neighborhood. The 116-minute running time allows for the slow buildup of a tremendously suspenseful

**COWBOY BEBOP: THE MOVIE** FEATURES A DEADLY TERRORIST THREAT INVOLVING MASSIVE EXPLOSIONS AND WHAT APPEARS TO BE THE RELEASE OF AN UNKNOWN BIOPLAGUE...



Terrorist suspect Raschid faces off against Spike Spiegel.

plot. Each of the main cast is given at least one scene in which to stand out to please their fans, but the main protagonist is Spike Spiegel. He has two lengthy action scenes in which he gets to demonstrate his martial-arts expertise, which has been only hinted at in the TV episodes.

The studio press kit for the American-retitled *Cowboy Bebop: The Movie* English-dubbed theatrical feature (featuring the same popular voice cast as the TV series) says that it made "its world premiere at the Big Apple Anime Fest 2002 (BAAF) in New York City [on Labor Day weekend]." But its original Japanese release was on September 1, 2001. (It was in Japan's top 15 box office for five weeks. In July 2002 it won the SPJA Industry Award, presented at Anime Expo in Long Beach, California, in the 2001 Best Japanese Anime Theatrical Release category.) This is significant because, if it had been delayed for just a few weeks, it would have looked like a blatant and unimaginative imitation of the 9/11/01 NYC terrorism combined with its follow-ups. *Cowboy Bebop: The Movie* features a deadly terrorist threat involving massive explosions and what appears to be the release of an unknown bioplague that kills thousands in a cityscape that is practically rotoscoped from NYC. The suspects include a mysterious Raschid in an Arabic district. At the same time that the largest reward

in history is offered for the terrorists (which attracts our *Bebop* gang), the authorities (both government and some powerful corporate villains) react with authoritarian force against all possible suspects. There are ominous implications that any bounty hunters who do actually find the terrorists may not be rewarded but "disappeared" for Knowing Too Much. One wonders whether a reason for the delay in the movie's general release since its film festival premiere last August has been that it was still too close to the 9/11/01 attacks.

So it is finally being released. But, despite *Cowboy Bebop*'s popularity with the American fans, it is only getting an art-theater release: one theater each in seventeen cities (well, two in NYC). Will it do well enough to earn a wider release for itself, or for the next anime theatrical feature to be released in America? Let's hope... ■

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**FRED PATTEN** has written on anime for fan and professional magazines since the late 1970s. He wrote the liner notes for Rhino Entertainment's *The Best of Anime* music CD (1998), was a contributor to *The World Encyclopedia of Cartoons*, 2nd Edition, ed. by Maurice Horn (1999) and [Animation in Asia and the Pacific](#), ed. by John A. Lent (2001).

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FILM REVIEWS

# Fresh from the Festivals:

## March 2003's Film Reviews

*by Jon Hofferma*



WITHIN THE WORLD OF ANIMATION, MOST EXPERIMENTATION occurs within short format productions, whether they be high budgeted commercials, low budgeted independent shorts, or something in between. The growing number of short film festivals around the world attest to the vitality of these works, but there are few other venues for exhibition of them or even written reviews. As a result, distribution tends to be difficult and irregular. On a regular basis, *Animation World Magazine* will highlight some of the most interesting with short descriptive overviews.

If you have the [QuickTime plug-in](#), you can view a clip from each film by simply clicking the image.

### This Month:

**The Affectionate Punch** (2000), 6 min., directed by Thor Adam Goodall, U.K. Info: Thor Adam Goodall. Email: [thor.goodall@btopenworld.com](mailto:thor.goodall@btopenworld.com)

**Les Chasseurs de Poissons (The Fish Hunters)**, 6.5 min., directed by Rosana Liera, France. Info: Rosana Liera. Email: [contact@rosanaliera.com](mailto:contact@rosanaliera.com)

**The Dark Side of the Morning** (2002), 6.5 min., directed by Erik Rosenlund, Sweden. Info: Erik Rosenlund. Email: [animator@spray.se](mailto:animator@spray.se)

**Dog** (2001), 5.75 min., directed by Suzie Templeton, U.K. Info: Adam Boulter, Animation Administrator, The Royal College of Art, Kensington Gore, London, SW7 2EU. Fax: 44-20-7590-4510. Email: [anim@rca.ac.uk](mailto:anim@rca.ac.uk)

**From the 104th Floor** (2002), 3.5 min., directed by Serguei Bassine, Russia/U.S.A. Info: Karen Gocsik. Email: [gocsik@dartmouth.edu](mailto:gocsik@dartmouth.edu)

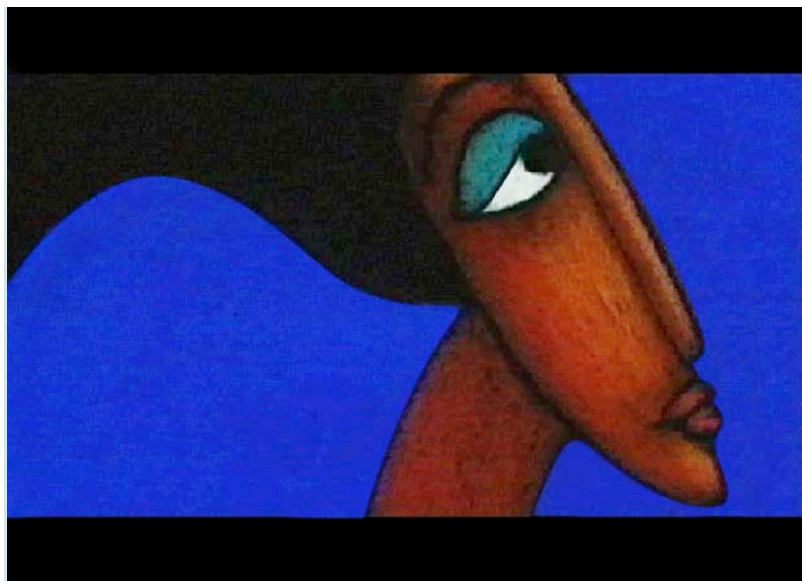


Visual references to Hitchcock, film noir and German Expressionism are made in *The Affectionate Punch* (left). *Les Chasseurs de Poissons (The Fish Hunters)* (right) makes a great visual and aural impact. *The Affectionate Punch* © Thor Adam Goodall/The Art of Darkness Studio 2003. *Les Chasseurs de Poissons* © Rosana Liera.

### THE AFFECTIONATE PUNCH

Director Thor Adam Goodall cites Alfred Hitchcock, film noir, German Expressionism and Russian puppet animation as influences, and they're all much in evidence in this, his debut film. A brief vignette about the murderous activities of the famous eponymous puppet, *The Affectionate Punch*, which was created with Lightwave and After Effects, is extremely well done. From his opening long tracking shot to his use of high-contrast lighting and portentous camera angles, Goodall, aided by his composer, Linda Christine Roast, has done a great job of capturing the look and feel of a highly stylized black-and-white suspense film (complete with scratches), while also benefiting from the extra layer of strangeness inherent in CGI visuals. However, *The Affectionate Punch* is as short on story as it is long on atmosphere, and despite its visual sophistication and knowing references, there's a ponderousness about the proceedings that belies the film's relatively short

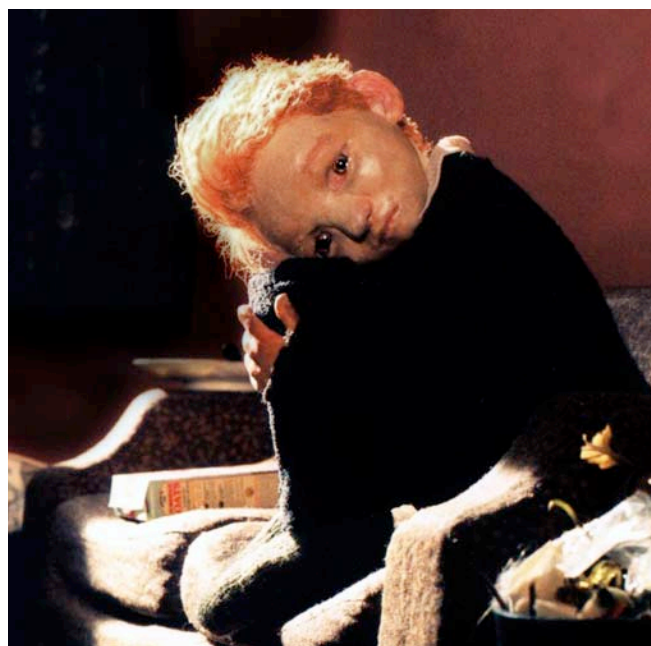
Thor Adam Goodall studied design and illustration at Goldsmiths College in London and currently divides his time between commercial graphic design and filmmaking. A self-taught animator, he spent two years creating *The Affectionate Punch*, working at his home studio, The Art of Darkness, in Norfolk. The film has screened at the Edinburgh International Film Festival, the Sitges International Fantasy Film Festival in Spain, and at a number of festivals in England.



### LES CHASSEURS DE POISSONS (THE FISH HUNTERS)

Using bold colors and a purposefully naive pictorial style, Rosana Liera has fashioned a myth about desert dwellers and the predatory fishermen who threaten them, despite the fact that no fish have been seen in those parts for eons. The film has great visual impact, and the several aural components — including the African-inflected music composed and performed by the filmmaker — work extremely well with the simple animation to create a sense of wonder and timelessness. Yet even after multiple viewings, the sequence of events and the moral of the story are rather hard to fathom. The fact that, despite appearances, the film isn't based on an existing folk tale, but was created by Liera from whole cloth, suggests that the problem may lie in the original conception, rather than in any failure of execution or interpretation.

Rosana Liera spent several years studying and teaching a variety of arts-related subjects in Italy, Germany and East Africa before receiving a grant to study at *La Poudrière* in Valence, France. *Les Chasseurs de Poissons*, which was created using both pastels and oil animated under the camera, and ink and pastels on cells, is her graduation film. *Les Chasseurs de Poissons* received the Renzo Kinoshita Prize at Hiroshima, and has screened at Anima Mundi, Annecy, *Zagreb, Ot-tawa*, City of Women (Slovenia), Siena and many other festivals.



*The Dark Side of the Morning* shows the other side of dawn. The faces on the puppets in Suzie Templeton's *Dog* are especially poignant and haunting. *The Dark Side of the Morning* © 2002 Erik Rosenlund. *Dog* © The Royal College of Art 2001.

### THE DARK SIDE OF THE MORNING

Erik Rosenlund's caustic tale of practical jokes and the tenuous nature of humor starts off promisingly with a nicely stylized rendering of dawn in the city, with light slowly creeping down the sides of buildings. Using pencil on paper to create an appropriately . . . well, dark . . . black-and-white milieu, Rosenlund displays a good visual sense. There are a number of imaginative ideas in the film, from the cubist-inflected characters to some unexpected plot twists, but *The Dark Side of the Morning* suffers from a strangely elongated sense of timing that seems misjudged rather than deliberate, and the gaps in narrative logic (e.g., the almost instantaneous appearance of a just-shot home video on broadcast TV) tend to undermine the film's effectiveness.

Erik Rosenlund attended the Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm, for which *The Dark Side of the Morning* was his graduation film. It has been shown at Annecy, Zagreb, Anima Mundi and the Ukraine's **KROK** festival.

### DOG

Giving new meaning to the word "bleak," Suzie Templeton's haunting and perfectly pitched puppet animation employs minimal means to explore a troubled father-son relationship transpiring amid surroundings that give new meaning to the word "squalor." Yet, though

the extremity of the characters' circumstances borders on a kind of very black humor, the film is in fact remarkably effective at conveying a real sense of sadness and loss, an impression made more powerful by the ambiguity that informs the dialogue and the equally meaningful silences. Comprising half a dozen short episodes, *Dog* derives most of its impact from Templeton's incredibly expressive characters, but everything from the lighting to the voices to Kostas Kyriakidis's otherworldly music is extremely well judged. Ultimately, *Dog* is probably too slight and a bit too sketchy to be judged a completely successful finished piece; however, Templeton demonstrates great skill and control, and a remarkable ability to generate complex emotions from nonliving actors.

After completing a science degree at University College London, Suzie Templeton spent several years having assorted adventures before deciding, while working at a women's refuge in India, to be an animator. Returning to England, she attended the **Surrey Institute of Art and Design**, where she made her first film, *Stanley* (1999), and then the **Royal College of Art**, where she made *Inside* (2001) and *Dog*. Among her influences are **Jan Svankmajer**, Jean-Pierre Jeunet (specifically *Delicatessen*), Tom Waits and Alan Sillitoe. She is currently working in association with Channel 4 on a "darkly comic version" of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*.



A woman must make a horrifying decision on 9/11 in *From the 104th Floor*. © Serguei Bassine 2002.

### FROM THE 104TH FLOOR

It's hard to know what to write about a film on such a loaded subject — the events of 9/11 and in particular the imagined thoughts and actions of a woman who jumped to her death. The text, read by Rosie Perez, is a heartfelt and beautifully understated poem written by a 14-year-old girl, Leda Rodis, and I'm tempted to think that its power is in some ways tied to its original form as words on a page, or as a piece to be read aloud, and that its effectiveness has been somewhat diluted by being given concrete visual form. That said, however, director Serguei Bassine has created a film that's both moving and discomfiting, not only due to the intimate depiction of a fellow human's final minutes, but also as a result of the surreal contrast between the horrific reality being depicted and the almost serene quality of the narration. The simple black-and-white images, which were hand-drawn except for one rotoscoped sequence, are eminently appropriate to the subject matter, and the film effectively transmits the strange mix of mundane observations, memories and emotions being processed by the narrator as she contemplates her severely dimin-

ished choices.

Serguei Bassine is a recent graduate of [NYU's](#) graduate film program. His first short film, the multi-award-winning *Because of Mama* (2001) premiered at Sundance, where *From the 104th Floor* also had its first screening. Bassine recounts that in the wake of the World Trade Center disaster, before making this film, he would often stand up and recite Leda Rodis' poem to his fellow passengers as he rode the subway between Brooklyn and Manhattan. Invariably he was touched by the feelings of hope the poem inspired. *From the 104th Floor* was funded by Showtime Network, for whom it was initially produced. ■

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**JON HOFFERMAN** is an independent filmmaker, writer and graphic designer. 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](http://www.carissimi.com)) and a shameless promoter.

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