

Welcome to ASIFA Central! We are the Midwest -US chapter of ASIFA, the oldest organization of animators in the world. Our chapter was established in 1975. While our community is separated by our far-flung geography, we are united by our love of animation. Our diverse membership is a blend of independent animators, animation artists, professors, seasoned pros, students, and fans of the art of animation. We have a robust board working on a number of initiatives for 2020 including Ani-Jam's, Bi-monthly get-togethers, and the annual retreat, described in this newsletter!

ASIFA Central Board (but never bored)



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Jim Middleton

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BASEMENT**
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Molder of Youthful Minds and Keeper of
Esoteric Knowledge
Steve Leeper

Tallest Human Ever to Animate
Robert Swieringa

Stopped Motionator and Tripod
Convergence Coordinator
Gary Schwartz

Charging Into the 28th ASIFA Central Retreat - July 17-19, 2020, on a Computer Screen Near Practically Everyone

"It's Virtual" – by Jim Middleton and Bob Swieringa, ASIFA Central Board Members

FRIDAY, July 17:

ASIFA is now 60 years old, and the Central chapter celebrates 45 years in just a matter of months. Its summer retreat was initially intended for Detroit, but an uncontrolled virus that doesn't care about animation techniques (besides stop-motion) had other plans.

ASIFA Central President Brad Yarhouse began the evening by acknowledging the challenges of creating a Zoom-based collection of programs – and offering sincere thanks for the tech-savvy members who made it possible. He added appreciation for first-responders battling the ongoing pandemic and a moment to reflect on those we have lost to its virulence.

Deanna Morse - now an official member of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences – <https://www.oscars.org/news/academy-invites-819-membership> – spoke on behalf of the international chapter and future activities and offered the ceremonial dropping of the official ASIFA Central retreat cake.



Whoopsie doodle!

One thing you can say for CoVid technology - for matters such as this retreat, it certainly enhanced sign up and attendance. Generally, a well-attended, in-person gathering will bring in two to three dozen attendees. This year's retreat clocked in 97 for the weekend, and 30-45 attended the daily special events, beginning with a lively presentation by Atomic Animation director, James Suhr.

James Suhr took the screen from his California location, using experiences gathered from a vast portfolio of his own, and provided his "28 and 1/2 Tips – or – How to Stop Worrying and Become a Professional Artist" (he said there were actually more, but confessed that math wasn't his best subject). From general observations to specific guidance, he offered direction to aspiring animators and storyboards, championing a well-curated and dynamic portfolio over a college degree. "Your portfolio is your resume," he stated with conviction, so show your prospective employer "what is in your bucket!" (For those getting the electronic version of this newsletter, the "28 and 1/2" essay is attached).

Many items on Suhr's bucket had the olfactory property of experience, especially with the reminder that even the most talented employee is still just



From <https://www.jamessuhr.com>

one part of a larger company, and ultimately (1) You are your own business, and (2) where you are is not forever. To prevent burnout, it is just as important to budget time for yourself and retain resources to feed your own business.

And speaking of the ol' factory, the refreshing mantra of, *"Be On Time, Bathe Often, and Be Easy to Work With"* should never be forgotten. As part of a larger team, co-workers should want to root for you, just as you should be appreciative for every production assistant. Production assistants circulate, and you may rediscover them often in the churning cataract of the corporate world.

Suhr encouraged fresh animators to craft themselves into better artists by studying body construction, understanding perspective and camera placement, finding the blessings of work restrictions, and deconstructing films for staging inspiration, especially with the sound turned off. Find the humor in tragedy, bounce every idea around before dismissing it, and please, please don't send around trailers for epics you can never produce ("If you want to make commercials, go into advertising.").

There is so much information to incorporate into every successful scene or sequence. "Forgive yourself. You'll have bad days." Animation can be akin to "a street fight."

And when creating thumbnails, "PULL BACK! YOU'RE IN TOO CLOSE!"

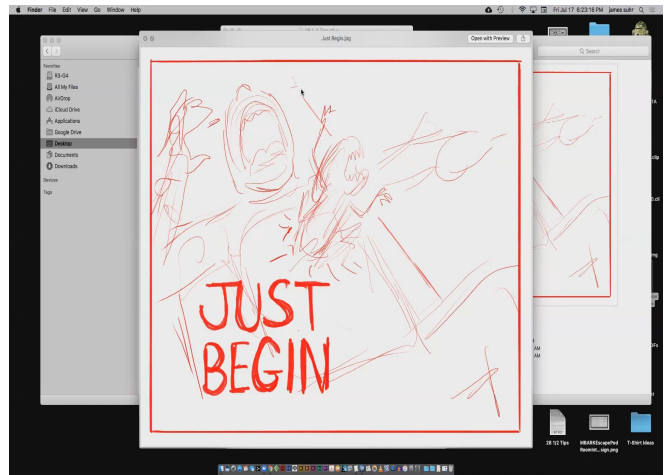
Don't be afraid of tracing other animation or motion in your pursuit of proper posing (As an example of this, your secretary uncovered an interview with Tony White, who was given the "I say" portion of Milt Kahl's Shere Khan in *The Jungle Book* as a tracing assignment from Richard Williams).

More Suhr things:

- See the website animationscreencaps.com for screen captures of Disney productions to give the feel for proper composition.
- Animation students who stream films only miss out on the old DVD "extras" that usually incorporated



James Suhr - get those pens out!



Motivational Posters, Suhr style

storyboards for the productions (Hayao Miyazaki releases generally have the entire feature storyboard as part of the DVD release). And, to the relief of many, more and more women are becoming storyboard artists.

- Building a story straight ahead can create roadblocks and write you into a corner. It is better to break things apart and see how the individual pieces work as part of the whole.
- Try an exercise - take any topic, ie. "keys," and build a 20 shot narrative about it. Imagine a night watchman checking the locks inside his building, suddenly beset with a zombie apocalypse, who races to his locked car, only to remember that he left his keys in the door where the zombies first appeared.
- Deadlines are always important, regardless of the project - you can have too much time on your hands. A deadline will get you past the brick wall of perfectionism.
- Work on many small possible failures and learn from them, rather than invest a long time on one single possible failure. It's ok to fail.
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*And pull back from overarching concerns while working:
"Remember – why can't it be fun?"*

Fun fact: *The furthest participant in the ASIFA Central Summer Retreat was from Panama City, Panama!*

SATURDAY, July 18:

The Saturday Morning Cartoon Show - Ten minutes into the carefully programmed event by Chuck Wilson, YouTube decided to pull the program "for copyright violations" because the play list included a Mickey Mouse cartoon *already freely available* on YouTube. However, we soon discovered that starting in the playlist after The Mouse created an uninterrupted presentation. *OM triple G – Kitbull* - cue the waterworks!

(Once the play list was finished on YouTube despite itself, the next film in automatic rotation was a mini-documentary about IT'S A MAD,MAD,MAD,MAD WORLD with examples of that movie's stop motion, the last work of Willis O'Brien. Animation RULES, even in a Mad World.)

Lightning rounds - Five minute speed talks on upcoming events and techniques set the afternoon in motion

Deanna Morse - ASIFA International Update - the technical challenges of the websites and communication pipelines for ASIFA International were only complicated by the ongoing CoVid pandemic, but films are being recognized and rewarded, workshops are ongoing, and a hard copy of the ASIFA journal will continue to be alive in our mailboxes.

Christine Veras presented her research and new findings on the Zoetrope's History. She traced the origins from William George Horner's hypothetical Daedaleum to the Zoetrope's multi-patented versions in 1867, uncovering that the original patent and name of the device were first registered the United States by a young sophomore named William Ensign Lincoln. He patented and licensed the invention to the Milton Bradley Company, which

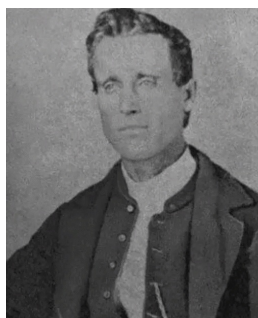
Time for some Grecian umbrage on YouTube crashes:

The rage! The cardiac tumult! Psychic disasters!
The fury of the thunder kissing bard when he perceives
His piddling opponent picking his dentures with dactyls!
Regard his orbs: how they roll; one this way, one the other!
Ah, the logotomy! Verb breasting adverb, the cristate nouns
Plunging gainst pavid pronouns! Let the bull stylistic
(Husband of cows) rise up and whirl his whiskers!
Ah the lambent raiding of verse, the (my God) tripsis
Of boant anapests leaping in lucent line
Against the skiaphagous luculent relulant
Phalanges of the foe! Yet must we bear in mind
The hepatic ingenium of the adversary, whose
Herpetic tongue knows too well how to rive
The hyaline dynamics of our arch-architect!
The Rest is SILENCE!

(The 'Croaking Chorus' from The Frogs by Aristophanes)



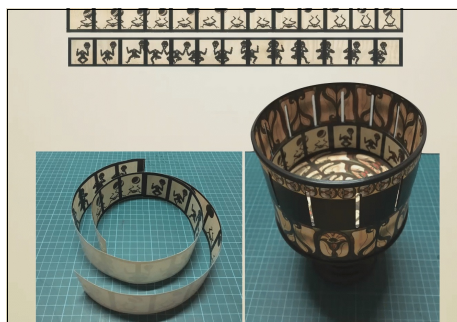
*Kitbull, Pixar 2020, *snif, sniff**



William George Horner,
hypothesizer of the
Daedaleum (from Christine
Veras' lightning round)

Brad Yarhouse - he provided IAD information, past and present - with upcoming deadlines for participation (the new deadline is September 1 for this year's assembly). In 2018, there were 7360 participants in the IAD, in 2019, there were 9355. Who knows what October will bring in 2020!?

Jim Middleton - Distorting Two Compositions - he used Audacity for fun with public domain music, making a Gershwin solo sound like honky-tonk and cutting a 1922 performance to only its aural frills.



Zoetropic editing! These machines could do anything but make coffee! (Image also from Christine Veras' lightning round)

Josh Harrell - The Ultimate Multiplane Setup - ASIFA Central's Ub Iwerks created his multiplane setup using 15 discarded glass panes where he teaches at Detroit's CCS, adapted a stand from IKEA, and worked through reflective glass and parallax challenges for his very deep dive into an analog technique that can track its path to the 1930s. Welcome to the 15th dimension - animation visualizes quantum mechanics!

was also responsible for patenting the device in the UK and France to guarantee its commercial exploitation in the international market. The details of her findings will appear in a peer-reviewed article this Fall.

Steve Leeper - he is animating on toast, crackers, toasted crackers, and we still think Kellogg should take notice -

his multiple images on toast took up to 100 minutes per sheet, and he had to develop the frames to hold the crackers, and it all justified the investment in some super expensive crackers - rice cakes nearly burned through!

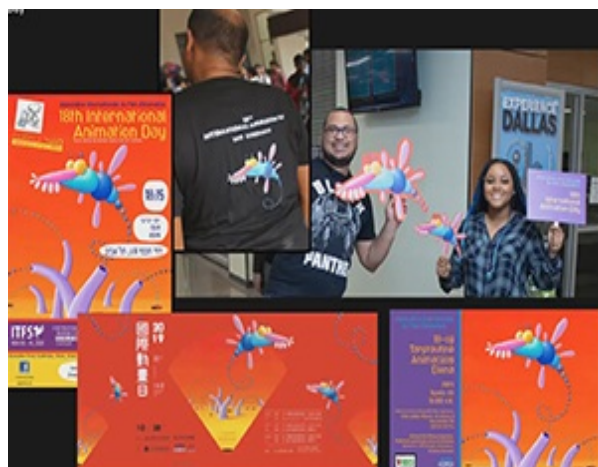
SATURDAY AFTERNOON'S LIGHTNING ROUND PHOTO GALLERY



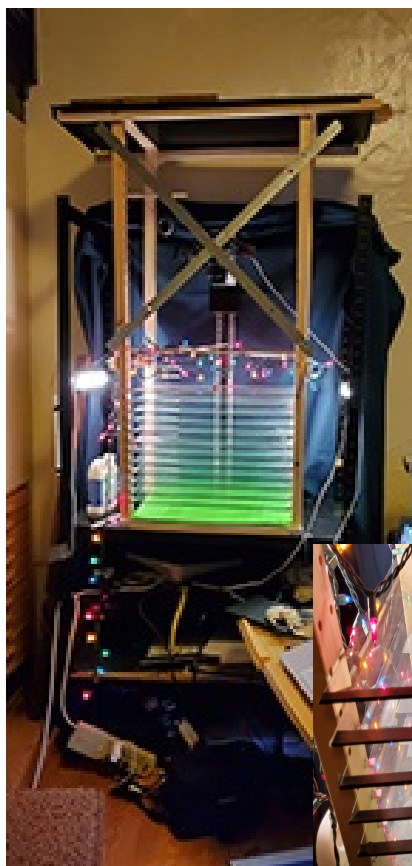
Steve Leeper's elegant bread toasting apparatus took up to 100 minutes to process a frame of laser etched deliciousness



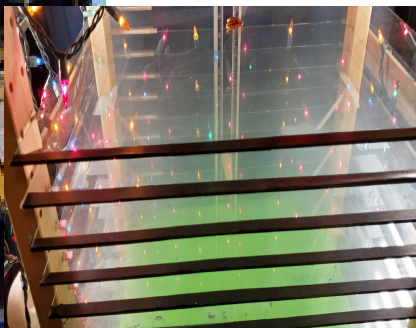
For comparison, a mid-century analog toast etching effort by CBS proved disappointing and didn't animate very well (CBS Sunday Morning, 2 August 2020)



Brad Yarhouse reported record attendance and participation to IAD 2019



Josh Harrell's 15 level multiplane camera with special effects lighting in place



Jim Middleton put the tin into tin pan alley by altering the Gershwin solo in Rhapsody in Blue, a 1924 composition now in the public domain

*Meet and Greet*s via Zoom followed, with reacquainted faces and scattered stories, finding alternates to expensive digital tablets and screens, and the benefits and use of Open Toonz, Krita, and Blender software. This was another Zoom experience, and the process was becoming nearly second nature by this time. Logged in participants were divided into smaller groups for –

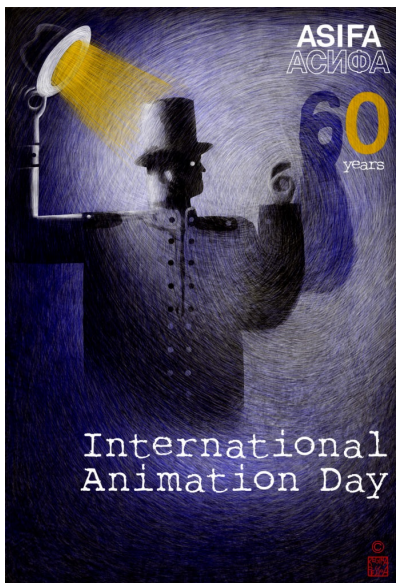
Then the Break-Out Workshops – with Nearly Instantaneous Show-and-Tell

Zoom Pixilation - *or* - **ANIMATING CONNECTIONS ACROSS SOCIAL DISTANCES**- orchestrated by Steve Leeper and Christine Veras, a lively series of spontaneous frames were paced by a percussive soundtrack. The final Zoom Pixilation Animation is available on Vimeo : <https://vimeo.com/440136518>

Here's a peek:



Stop motion cutouts - coordinated by Chris Sagovac - "What do animators want? Time!" A CoVid pandemic helped provide that this year... Deanna noted that the recurring theme in this workshop of paper dolls was apparently "Off With Their Heads!"



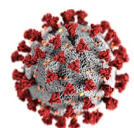
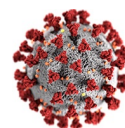
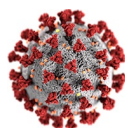
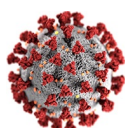
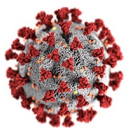
The Premiere of the IAD 2020 ASIFA Central Anijam

- An ongoing project since this spring, the anijam had its two minute showing, and it was a hit! Random voices extolled, "It was nice to see it all together - we've only seen bits of it before - it's like watching a new film."

The final version will join the IAD celebration in October.

Christine Veras was also able to demonstrate her invention, the silhouette zoetrope, complete with a turntable powered by a manual mechanism, much like very early phonograph. The insect cut-outs were on the outside of the eight slit cylinder, giving a final hypnotic effect of floating butterflies! An earlier version was a finalist for *Best Illusion of the Year* in 2016 and can be seen at –

<http://illusionoftheyear.com/2016/06/silhouette-zoetrope>



Saturday, July 18, 7:30pm - Nina Paley and Seder-Masochism



A father-daughter heart-to-heart

After a quick and quixotic introduction, independent animator, cartoonist, and producer Nina Paley directed President Yarhouse to *Pull The String!* and *Seder Masochism* began its 80 minute ASIFA Central Zoom premiere performance, followed by an extensive Q and A session moderated by Julie Goldstein.

The incorporation of interviews with her late father, appearing here as "God" lent a poignancy to her unblinking look at Exodus and the rituals of the Passover Seder. Where her previous feature, *Sita Sings the Blues*, took on copyright issues at great personal expense, she said this time there was absolutely *no* intent to obtain permission for any of the songs used, including one from a local Urbana band who would have gladly given it. By going without a distributor, Paley's viewer ship increased ten fold; and, by freely sharing, she finds that her contribution-based income exceeds the comparative pittance handed down from a distributor.



Nina Paley encourages safe animation

Paley was very direct about her challenges with the film - "I couldn't relate to Moses," she explained, finding a closer relation to the Merlin

Stone book, *When God Was A Woman* (available used from many online sources). The film's theme of the "goddess goes underground" didn't emerge until late in her production, but the Passover story had already become a main portion of the film by then.

Paley's current, comparatively simple lifestyle in Illinois allows her time with her mother and permits her to "make art because it's healthy for me."

Her current project, based on Armageddon (the biblical account, not the 1998 film with Bruce Willis) and called *Apocalypse*, will likely be a short film (however, it should be noted, that both *Sita* and *Seder* began as short films).

Chris Sullivan, set to discuss his *Orbits of Minor Planets* on Sunday, made the point that Nina Paley has inspired other animators through her creation of a truly unique animation style.

Much of *Seder* was created in Flash, but a significant portion was built using Moho animation, a descendant of

Anime Studio with a steeper learning curve.

Palegraylabs.com is Paley's merchandising site featuring her current fascination with embroidery and embroiderment - and a few matzoh covers are left!

The earlier YouTube challenge with the Saturday morning cartoons prompted *Seder* to be run through the Yarhouse computer complex onto Zoom, which worked out very well - there were some bumps in the sound, and an occasional appearance of the video control panel, but overall, it felt true to a theatrical viewing, even if it was on a computer screen. The popcorn was *fantastic!*



An apocalyptic vision by Nina Paley, probably not part of the film, and not used with permission.

SUNDAY, July 19: Noon-1pm -

The Meeting of the Board, but Never Bored

In his patient effort to herd kittens, Chuck Wilson created a special Zoom presence for ASIFA board members at noon.

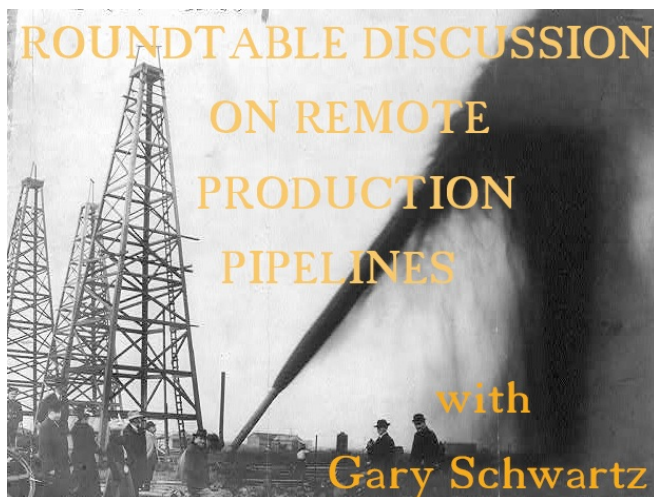


Yes, the board is that adorable

In a win for whimsy, directions for proper handling of telegram and pony express announcements will remain part of the by-laws.

In a win for efficiency, board members will serve three year staggered terms, committees will be ad hoc and not permanent, gender neutral pronouns will now be a part of the by-law environment.

Still another Fun Fact: Synonyms for *ad hoc* include ad-lib, down and dirty, extemporaneous, extemporary, extempore, impromptu, improvisational, improvised, off-the-cuff, offhand, offhanded, snap, spur-of-the-moment, unplanned, or unpremeditated (not unpremedicated, that's something entirely different)



Sunday, 1-2 pm - A Roundtable Discussion on Remote Production Pipelines
The challenge! The angst! The need for stronger

coffee at 1pm! Thirty attendees squeezed into the compressed Zoom screen to discuss the challenges of:

- Hybrid classes - The short answer to "How?" is "50:50." The long answer is "I don't know." A thought experiment: Should a student move to another state to stay in a dorm in order to take one on-site class?
- Run half-sized classes, clean and sanitize everything in-between sessions?



Gary Schwartz keeping the communication pipeline open

- How to address the time zone challenges of at-distance students
- If all remote - the challenge of on-site licensed software access
- Some software licenses (ie, *ToonBoom*) are being extended by their respective managers
- The spectre of students *Ghosting* - and how to pull information from them and keep communication channels open, with the consideration for the amount of effort that entails

"We're perceived to have authority we don't really have."

2-2:30 - Public Domain Music Update - A Jim Middleton Babble-On

The big question from the presentation was: just how do you make MIDI's out of mp3's? (Answer: we still don't know - a priest may have to be summoned.)

1924 is now the magic year for material entering into the public domain. However, for music, that represents the composition, not the performance, and even if the performance is from 1924, if it's a reissue, or not in your possession, it could be litigated on a state-by-state basis. SO, you can now perform *Rhapsody in Blue*, for example, but you cannot use a 1980 production of it. And even if it's a reissued 1924 recording (near the end of the acoustic era of production), whoever may have released it would still hold the rights to *that* particular "performance" (ie, as a "stereo enhancement" or with "static removed").

In 2021, material from 1925 enters into the public domain - that includes *Always* by Irving Berlin, the *broadway* script to the Marx Brothers' musical *The Cocoanuts*, and material recorded electrically (via microphone) which tends to be of greater interest to corporate copyright lawyers. By 2024, the first films featuring Mickey Mouse fall under that category, but again, only if you have an early print to work from - every subsequent Disney iteration or reissue contains within it some "enhancement" that creates a new performance with a new copyright starting point.

In short, there are a lot of opportunities, but be careful, and when it comes to music, appreciate the 19th century composers and their more obscure performances.



A noisy studio



Not a turntable, but Jim wants to build one someday, because one cannot have too much electrostatic cling.

Sites of possible interest for further Public Domain information:

archive.org, - but beware, much of their material has not been vetted

UCSB Cylinder Audio Archive -
<http://cylinders.eks.dld.library.ucsb.edu/>,
1890-1925 material, but they charge a fee for commercial use of their material

The Duke University Law School
web.law.duke.edu/cspd/publicdomainday/2020
(or, just Google "Public Domain Day") keeps the latest on copyright law available, along with listings of what is up for grabs.

Nauck's Vintage Record Auction - 78rpm.com
(rare, mostly PD recordings in mp3 format from their Dismuke radio broadcasts). Nauck's sample show discs #39 - 67 each contain 7-14 hours of programming, with tons of information and obscure background on historic speeches, popular jazz, and even mysterious hillbilly issues from the early 1930s that auction out at \$500-\$1000. However the CDs are \$20, and the series hits its stride at #45. More recent releases contain an index for all available material on the

discs and where to find the selections. ***Sunday, 2:30 - 3pm - Coffee meet and greet, the sequel***

Steve Segal revealed production secrets behind his 1984 production of *Futuropolis*, Melissa Bouwman told how she made use of UICA's band when her film's music rights were gobbled up by BIG BUSINESS, and Deanna Morse described the convolutions in obtaining her music for *Charleston Home Movie*....and the break was OVER! But wait, there was MORE!



Charleston Home Movie, 1980, by Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences member, Deanna Morse!

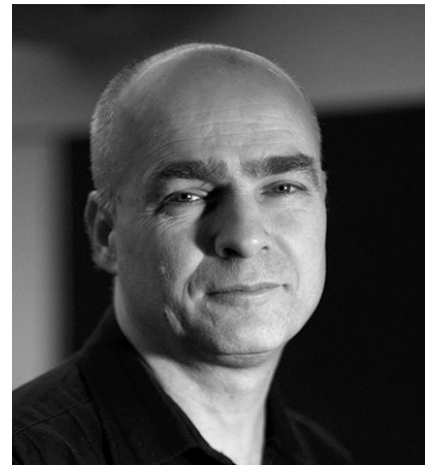
Links:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roPTnwmWtNs>
<http://framefools.com/charleston-home-movie-1980/>

3pm - Chris Sullivan and The Orbit of Minor Satellites

Keeping the retreat's Midwestern theme going, Chicago based Chris Sullivan provided an update on his work-in-progress for *The Orbit of Minor Satellites*, with a series of completed sequences.

Amid the sharing of production processes, including funding sources, Sullivan provided some experiences and words of wisdom:



The Amazing Chris Sullivan

On Health: "If you don't have cancer by now, you have something wrong with you." This seems to be the curse of entering life's third act. Accept the diagnosis as another new normal, and don't let it rule your life, but do take every opportunity to show this uninvited guest it is quite unwelcome (editor's comment).

On unrealistic expectations: When you're middle aged or beyond, "accept your mediocrity." In other words, build upon the skills you already have.

On story: Film editing creates "causality between the shots." This statement should be embroidered into every animator's pillow.

On film festivals: If you create feature films, you are more likely to get free festival transport and rooms. "I make feature films, but I don't really watch them." However, Sullivan appreciates films that can generate "cathartic tears."

On audiences: "The wonderful thing about film festivals is that the audience isn't filmmakers." This gives the producer the opportunity to experience an audience vs a peer reaction to the final product.

On covering expenses: Crowdfunding is a surprising source of production revenue, often from unexpected donations. "Crowdfunding critics have never really done it." Nevertheless,



Image from *The Orbit of Minor Satellites*, Chris Sullivan's work-in-progress

Sullivan recommends having a significant amount of work done before seeking crowd funding for any film project.

On recreation: Sullivan reads Nancy Drew stories to unwind, noting, "They're all adventure and no danger. The worst thing that ever happens to her is she gets tied up." He pondered what sort of father she must have. It takes a strange dad to say, "I send little girls into abandoned houses to find the bad man." As Sullivan wrote and rewrote the feature, the realization of a Russian-American subtext came late into the production of *Orbit*, creating a "cold war in the house" for its characters. It wasn't an expectation going into the production - but as Dickens discovered, created personalities can often take over the quill.

The production was constructed around the voice of Boris Karloff, pulled from several sources, and Sullivan procrastinated on getting rights to use the Universal Studios legend. Luckily, Boris Karloff's daughter, now 86 and custodian of all film, image, and verbal performances of her father, gladly gave him permission after hearing the full story of *The Orbit of Minor Satellites*.

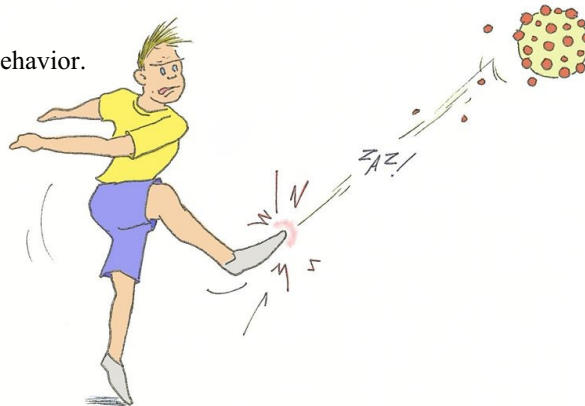
The crowd funding for the feature is at www.orbitkickstart.com - remember, when it comes to animated features, no donation is too large!

When Chris Sullivan gave the answer to his last question, Brad looked out at everyone through his ZOOM portal, and let us know we could all go home now, but we were already home, so we all stood for a few seconds, reached over to the "leave meeting" button, and had to face the rest of the day on our own.

Members of ASIFA Central have decided to keep this ZOOM experience going - there will be subsequent meetings over the next several months, the first being around a discussion of the UPA films and their influence. In reality, it's all about the pizza, but a McBoing Boing with pepperoni sounds pretty nice, too.

Open-source and alternative production packages discussed during the 2020 ASIFA Central retreat: Opentoonz, Krita, Blender 2.8, Moho (formerly Anime Studio), and the grease pencil function in the latest version of Blender that creates 2D animation. Alternate for a Cintiq tablet - Kamvas Pro 16

Till next time, you're on your own best behavior.



ASIFA Central Newsletter (cc) Sum- Sum- Summertime 2020 <https://asifa.org/> And <https://www.facebook.com/groups/asifacentral/>
As usual, send any suggestions, comments, or recipes for zucchini bread, along with the usual castigations to yr hmbl typist, at jim.middletonrx@gmail.com ...