

SUMMER 2002



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A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF ASIFA/Central

SUMMER 2002

10th Annual Midwest Animators Conference a Rousing Success by Dave Daruszka

Animators from around the Midwest joined together during the last weekend of April to take part in the 10th Annual Midwest Animators Conference presented by ASIFA Central.

The site of the Conference, the DoubleTree Guest Suites Hotel, was a new location for the event. The amenities included a 90-seat business theatre with stadium-style seating where the majority of the programs were held.

The Conference opened with a dessert reception on Friday evening with Mayor Brian Krajewski of the Village of Downers Grove in attendance. The reception was followed by a presentation of animation from the National Film Board of Canada. Jack Horwitz of the NFB introduced the program. Open screenings, a long-standing feature of the Conference, were held in the Hospitality Suite following the program.

Saturday's activities were kicked-off with a fascinating and informative presentation by Marc Vulcano, Director of Animation of Big Idea Productions. Mr. Vulcano outlined his personal approach to animation and provided a step-by-step process for

Inside this Issue
Letter from the President
and more ...



character animators to follow to produce exceptional work. His presentation included examples of drawing techniques and clips from some of Big Idea's "Veggie Tales" shorts. Vulcano stressed the significance of craft

and a willingness to accept criticism and input from peers, as well as the importance of seeking out mentors.

Lunch followed this program, and the hotel provided an extraordinary deli buffet that delighted the attendees. The highlight of lunch was a drawing for prizes provided by ASIFA Central President Jim Middleton. The irrepressible Middleton presided over the drawing, giving away a plethora of art books and animation paraphernalia.

The first program of the afternoon was an overview of animation products from NewTek, presented by Philip Nelson, NewTek's East Coast Sales Manager. Nelson took the attendees through a tour of "Aura" and "Lightwave 3D", showing the ease of

Rousing Success (Daruszka) continued on 4

Greetings from the President by Jim Middleton

This newsletter is clustered with events that demonstrate that animation is alive and well in the region of ASIFA Central. And the year isn't over yet! The April conference was a breathless, amazing collection of seminars and presentations, and the first KAFI showed that the area can support an international festival in our own back yard. This October, Ottawa beckons--and while it has been two years since the last gathering, I'm still just now filing the notes I made in 2000 (little wonder the drawing table is getting dusty!). O Canada! Comme j'aime votre cafe!

Our website, by the way, craves your attention. It wants to know what you wish it to become. Forward

your comments to any one of the board members (conveniently located on the masthead on page two for your dining pleasure), or I shall have to poll the membership individually (and won't that be painful).

If you are in an area that craves membership applications, let us know that too--we're redesigning our lil' ol' brochure and can gleefully clog your mailbox with specimens suitable for framing or using as bookmarks in your dogeared copy of The Animator's Survival Kit.

Thus ends this rude interruption to the latest opus edited by our ever patient Jennifer.

Hiroshima Poster from ASIFA/Central Reply

Thanks to everyone who contributed to the poster at the ASIFA conference in April! It made it to Japan!
Jim Middleton

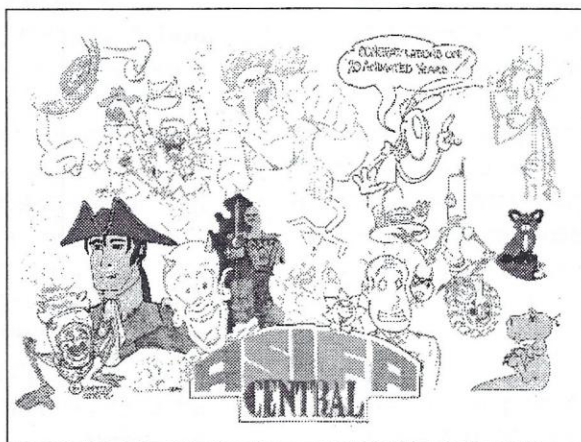
Thank you very very much for kindly taking your time to make the beautiful drawing for ASIFA-Japan!!

It reached us safe last week, and I must apologize you for this delay to write you...

I am very honoured to be able to exhibit your work in HIROSHIMA2002. Please send my best regards to all your members too.

Thank you very much for everything!!

Sincerely yours,
Sayoko Kinoshita



ASIFA/Central Mission Statement ASIFA: Association Internationale du Film d'Animation

The purpose of ASIFA/Central is to promote the art of animation locally and internationally and to promote communication among animators and between animators and devotees. – adopted 3/92

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To join ASIFA/Central:
Send a check (payable in US dollars to ASIFA/Central) to the address on the back of this newsletter.

Printed in the U.S.A on recycled paper.

The Midwest Animator's Conference:

Comments from Attendees by Deanna Morse

The Midwest Animator's Conference, moved to a new location, was a bit changed this year, and although several folks missed the trails of Starved Rock, animators agreed that it was one of the best conferences ever. When I asked a group of attendees to tell me their observations and highlights of the conference, this is what they said.

People liked the small group experience, with the high quality presentations. Everyone felt at home, more comfortable than at some other events. Big Idea's presentation was informative, and the group was easily able to restate the four steps of character animation

1. research and homework,
2. set up the preliminary stages,
3. execute,
4. proofread/check for glitches.

Having the room to share animations with each other was appreciated, and several folks said they intend to stay in touch with animators they met through those open screenings.

Liz Zielke, animator and student at Grand Valley State University, served as a student volunteer for the conference. She said, "As a volunteer, I made sure that everything was set up nicely. I organized the registration table, and I ran the VCR and tapes during the presentations."

"It was interesting being a student volunteer. I felt like I got in on more stuff because I was always there and at registration I got to meet people right away. I could talk to the people when the presentation was over. It was easy to approach the speakers; they all thought I was important!"

"It was also a plus to get free room and board. The room was nice and big. It was comfortable, and I had it all to myself. Mary Lou and Dave were cool. They were really nice and fun to work with. And Jim Middleton as fun - he was really friendly right away."

"I liked the technical presentations, like the Lightwave program. It made me want to explore that program. It was interesting to see what the company had done, including video games. I liked getting the free software!"

For Jim Schaub and Melissa Bouwman the highlight of the retreat was seeing Skip Battaglia's presentation, where he showed his independent work and shared the great stories behind it. They valued his enthusiasm and his reasons for undertaking and structuring the films as

they were. Jim said, "I liked his line, 'They say animators are patient, but it is not true! I'm not patient at all!'" and Melissa said, "I liked when he said, 'Film is an interruption of life. You just want to get it done and then get on with it.'" They were impressed that he didn't start drawing until he was 30, and also with his strategy of writing down dreams and images upon awakening and using them as core elements in his films.



Recent graduate Bev Alger chose the ASIFA retreat over her college graduation ceremony, and was excited when her ticket was pulled and she won the first door prize. "The weekend

was a lot more exciting than going to graduation. I liked seeing the variety of work: *Boconi's Bike*, *That Special Monkey*, *the Barbara Manatee Song* and *The Big Snit*."

Bev valued the opportunity to meet so many people who worked in a variety of positions: layout designer, audio designer, web designer, animator. "It was interesting to see the different ways people get things done - as independents, and in the industry. There are so many different ways that you can get it done."

Everyone agreed that the weekend was a good opportunity for schmoozing, networking, and making new friends. Everyone commented, too, on how well organized the event was - things ran on time and very smoothly.

The retreat was followed just two weeks later by the Kalamazoo Animation Festival International - KAFI. So Midwest Animators got a double treat of two weekends of inspiring animation this spring! We hope next year to have the retreat in conjunction with the KAFI festival; to combine and support our interests. It was a great few weeks of animation!

Thanks to organizers Dave Daruszka and Mary Lou Haynes for their top notch event. It was inspirational, educational and fun!

Deanna Morse is a professor at Grand Valley State University and treasurer of ASIFA Central.

Rousing Success (Daruszka) continued from 1

creating work on the software. Nelson stressed the cost-effectiveness of NewTek's products as well as their versatility. He fielded a barrage of questions, many from animators and studios looking to purchase an "all-in-one" software package.

After a short break, Jack Horwitz returned to speak about the history and work of the animation unit of the National Film Board of Canada. Horwitz explained the difficulty of working for a government agency while maintaining the atmosphere of artistic freedom that gives NFB productions their unique signature. He explained the difference between "sponsored films", those produced for other government agencies, and independent works from animators affiliated with the NFB. Horwitz was joined by animator Shira Avni, who's recently completed short "From Far Away" was screened. Her animation dealt with the emotional stress a young Lebanese girl encounters when her family is forced to relocate to Canada. Horwitz also screened clips from classic animated shorts produced at the NFB, including work by Norman McClaren.

The next presentation on the schedule was an overview by animator and educator Deanna Morse on the two-year process of completing a DVD compilation of her independent work. Morse took the audience through a tour of the DVD while explaining the many steps required to bring the project to completion. She explained her good fortune to work with a local production company in Grand Rapids, Michigan that enthusiastically undertook the work and the individuals who provided invaluable technical assistance. The DVD was funded through a series of arts grants, and Morse explained that while the medium was an ideal outlet for animators, production costs and distribution are an obstacle to the average independent animator.

The gathering broke for dinner and then returned to hear the evening's final speaker, animator and educator Skip Battaglia from the Rochester Institute of Technology. Battaglia screened a number of his award-winning films and explained the influences in his work, including Modernist artists from the early part of the 20th Century. He explained his philosophy behind his "hand-made" films, and

regaled the audience with his humor and experiences. He revealed a great knowledge and love of the cinema that is readily apparent in his abstract work.

The evening closed with more open screenings of attendees' works, including studio productions, independent and student animations. Sunday morning's BYOB (Bring Your Own Breakfast) was a continuation of the open screenings until the conference ended at noon.

The 10th Midwest Animators Conference was a great success, and many attendees commented on the quality of the programs and the inspiration they drew from both the speakers and other animators in attendance. The goal of the event coordinators, Dave Daruszka and Mary Lou Haynes, was to raise the level of professionalism of the event while maintaining the atmosphere of openness and conviviality that has become its hallmark. Everyone left invigorated and looking forward to next year's event.

- Dave Daruszka



Fun Quotes

"When you run out of funny ideas, add a cow."
- Mike Allore

The Tenth ASIFA Central Retreat – Random Observations *by Jim Middleton*

The term retreat seemed incongruous with the proposed pace and scope of this year's gathering, so a grander vision and venue was needed for this tenth anniversary. Even the ultimate description of conference seemed limited to describe the weekend coordinated by Dave Daruszka and Mary Lou Haynes; with the attendance of representatives of Big Idea Productions, would pilgrimage have befit the proceedings?

Centralized to Chicago, the move east prompted more attendance from commercial participants; there were certainly more new faces in the crowd. DoubleTree Guest Suites seemed overwhelmed by the cross section of conferences being hosted that weekend--but there was coffee if you knew where to look, and there was an eclectic blend of cacophony available in the central dining atrium.

But the main events were percolating in the conference rooms, and they began with opening ceremonies attended by the mayor of Downers Grove, a



representative from the Chicago Tribune, and even the Cultural Affairs attache from the Canadian embassy. One gentleman even appeared, registered, and then stayed only long enough to pass on a video

copy of the anime "Metropolis," obtain photographic evidence of the transaction, and then vanish into the night. And did I mention the full service bar? And cheese, Gromit, cheese!

Jack Horwitz from the Film Board of Canada began the weekend with his overview of the marvels from their past and their promise for the future; more aficionado than animator, his enthusiasm set the upbeat tone for the conference (and it continues to this day, and can spill over onto your desktop if you mail him at j.horwitz@nfb.ca).

Marc Anthony Volcano erupted (oh isn't that a clever turn of the verb) with the Big Idea of Veggie Tales. Offering generous quotes from the Books of Johnson and Thomas, he described the Rules of Animation and

showed how they were integrated into the output of his studio. Say what you want, these guys are geniuses of marketing, and equally phenomenal with using their organization for maximal effect--their soon-to-be released theatrical feature was created with a staff of 8 animators (certainly as Felliniesque an allusion as one could ever draw), and the represents Mr. Volcano's simultaneous involvement as the film's director.

The evolution of Lightwave from its beginnings at Commodore as Video Toaster was Philip Nelson's contribution, and his generosity didn't stop there – he had copies of software! One of the purposes of these retreats is to get everyone worked up to create amazing things; the ultimate letdown comes afterwards as the workaday left-brain activities scream for their undue attention. A few minutes toying with a Lightwave demo can make you feel invincible and undaunted and ready to face any project with a stimulated mind and a hefty double-click (I know I'd love to set up a long line of PCs or iMacs, each loaded with whatever the latest demo I've seen, and then lock the door and emerge only for coffee and bathroom breaks, the latter being potentially truncated with proper surgical intervention...but that's just me).

And animators, did I mention animators!? Michigan native and snappy dresser Deanna Morse, creator of Deanimation and now a DVD producer of Move-Click-Move! showed how her interactive screen menu was just as entertaining as her collection of films (and she has a few DVDs left, feel free to contact her at morsed@gvsu.edu). Skip Battaglia from New York's Rochester School of Technology gave a retrospective of his 20 years of animated work, each specimen representing a personal vision. He discussed his frustration with getting music rights, relating how he tried to track down a particular jazz piece but then made use of a student from Rochester's music department with a penchant for a capella – one of the performances by Bobby McFerrin that won't be found on any of his CD releases.

After all this, your humble typist had to return to the vaguely suppressed coloration of so-called reality, with the somber grays of a rainy Midwestern Sunday, comforted only by the potential for another such gathering of ASIFA fans and friends within the year.

- Jim Middleton

KAFI Judges Produce Quality Program

by Dave Baker

Three esteemed ASIFA central members judged the Kalamazoo Animation Festival International. Veteran animation instructor and judge for the Seoul animation festival in Korea, Deanna Morse, animator extraordinaire and historian Jim Middleton of the Animating Apothecary, and artist, animator, instructor Melissa Bouwman. These dedicated professionals hunkered down for two weekends in April to review and judge the over 200 entries into the festival.

The environment was straightforward. A classroom/auditorium at KVCC with theatrical video projection and sound afforded the judges a venue similar to what would be seen at the State Theater in Kalamazoo.

In other festivals, because of the volume of entries, a selection committee will often pare down the films so the judges do not have to watch every film. Because we were dealing with only 200 as opposed to 1000 films, we used a simpler system. Watch them all. Some films were immediately disqualified because of non-conformance with entry specifications. Other films were subject to "The Mercy Flag" which allowed the judges, who had seen enough after two minutes, to stop the film. Remarkably, the high quality and watch ability of most of the films limited the use of "The White Flag of Mercy"

To aid in the judging, a 'rubric' system was used. A rubric is a simple scaling tool. In it, we had eight judging scales, which included; Story, Design, Art Direction, Animation, Sound Track, Technical Quality, Judge's Score, and a tie-breaking category, Watchability. These categories had a 1 to 10 scale on it that allowed a total of eighty points to be awarded to a film. Three judges scored the films allowing a grand total of 240 points that would determine the ranking of all the films. This provided an overall picture of a film, which, while being objective, made room for subjectivity, but also evened the playing field and removed much of the bias found in more subjective systems.

The festival manager showed each of the 19 categories individually. In other words, all the postgraduate entries were shown together. This provided context with which to view and judge. The VHS entries were announced only by title, the judges would write the title of the film down and the category. No national origin or director's names were mentioned to eliminate bias. Judging went fast and smoothly. With a liberal supply of donuts, coffee and pineapple topped pizza, the process was, in many ways a wonderful little film festival on its own.

Judging sheets were collected at the end of the day and scores entered into an Excel worksheet providing instant tabulation after processing.

Each category was awarded a bronze, silver and gold medal. Some categories had no entries and no awards given.

While judging, it became obvious that some categories such as SGR (graduate students) and ISW (independent short works) were wellsprings of excellence and creativity. Room was made in the program for these outstanding works. The judges awarded both recognition and money to these outstanding films by creating a special category called "High Honors".

Two more award categories were created. Two outstanding films "Tongues and Taxi's" and "Rockin and Rollin" came in with perfect scores of 240 and were awarded "Best of Show" Little Red Plane was singled out as Director's choice because of excellence and the educational context of the makers. (www.littleredplane.com).

After reviewing the process, the Judging staff of Deanna, Jim and Melissa made recommendations to the director on distribution of award monies and creation of the special "High Honors" category. It was felt that all finalist should share in the rewards since, in effect, all finalists were winners. The breakdown of awards was as follows. All finalists are being awarded \$100; bronze medal winners \$200, Silver medal \$300 and Gold Medal \$400. High Honors receive \$200, Director's choice \$400 and Best of Show \$500.

With excellent judging, fair scoring and plenty of patience, the Judges for KAFI 2002 should be applauded for their world class work! Thank you!

- David Baker

Call for Screeners

Next year, KAFI will again call for the world's best animation. We will be anticipating even a greater quantity of high quality entries. We will need to screen these and narrow down these entries to keep the judging concise. We will use a similar system that will distribute the work to keep the quality high.

If you care to be on the screening team, please email me at dbbaker@kvcc.edu or call 616-372-5520 to volunteer.

KAFI Rocks the Midwest!

by *Melissa Bouwman*

Part One

I would just like to take this opportunity to publicly thank David Baker for having the vision, dedication, and spirit, to organize the Midwest's first international Animation Festival! I'm raising a glass of a fine chilled white wine in toast to you Dave!

The Kalamazoo Animation Festival International (KAFI) blasted on the festival scene with great success May 17-19, 2002. I'm pleased to have been involved as a member of the selection committee, and as a giddy attendee. The weekend was packed with a veritable buffet of delightful goodies to tempt the palette of those who have a special place in their heart for animation. My experience at KAFI was festive, educational, and inspirational. For those of you who could not attend, here's your chance to live vicariously through my experience. In part one of my review of the festival, we'll explore the Cartoon Challenge and the Seminars I attended. In part two, we'll get an inside look at the animation screenings and anything else I can't fit into part one :-).

On Thursday night, I was invited to attend a lavish and swanky opening party for those who contributed lots of time, knowledge, or financial backing to make this event possible. It was held in the facilities of Nucleus Multimedia Company. Nucleus has one of the most aesthetically pleasing workspaces I've ever visited...second only to PIXAR. I attended the party with Deanna Morse. We were both very impressed with the delectable food that had been catered for this party. Amongst my favorite edibles were the sushi buffet, and of course, the glorious table of sweets. Adult libations were also on the menu that evening...it was a rough walk back to the hotel for me... The food and drink were merely a backdrop for the enthusiastic group to converse, and make merry. I found myself in the company of many captivating folks, all of us were brimming with anticipation, waiting for the weekend's events to start. Of course most of the conversation centered around KAFI-talk. It was a delightful way to kick off a fabulous weekend of fun and excitement.

Cartoon Challenge

Friday morning, I popped out of bed (an action that only happens at important animation events), and went to pick up my weekend pass so I could proudly display my badge of attendance, and so I could get into the events without hassle. I decided to check in on the Cartoon Challengers that morning. The Cartoon Challenge was an amazing competition unique to KAFI. Eight teams of highly motivated and talented students from several

educational institutions had taken the challenge to produce an animated PSA in the course of one week. Their assignment was given to them on Monday morning, and by Friday night at 5:00 pm, they had to have the PSA completed...WHEW! Their topic: promoting arts education as an integral part of every child's education.

When I poked my head into the computer lab on Kalamazoo Valley Community College's Texas campus, I saw very sleepy groups of animators feverishly working against their 5:00 pm deadline. I knew some of the challengers from Grand Valley, and I asked them when they'd slept last. The reply was...7:00 pm Wednesday night...it was 10:30 am Friday at that time, so they'd been awake for nearly 40 hours at that point. A feat only the young could survive without great consequence.

Even in their sleep deprived state, they were chattering excitedly about the incredible experiences they've had all week. They had met some "super cool" people, been given access to "super cool" equipment, light tables, and stacks of animation paper. They raved about the food, the resources, the camaraderie, and of course, the "super cool" animations that were shaping up all around them. I strolled about the work areas, checking out the various PSA's, stepping over the occasional slumbering team members, before returning to the main festival events downtown. I was very impressed with what I saw, and couldn't wait to see the finished projects.

Fast-Forward to the Saturday Night Competition Screening, when the Cartoon Challenge PSA's were scheduled to premiere. The Cartoon Challengers had been moving through the festival events in herds, they had apparently developed strong friendship bonds with their competitors. During the screening, they had parked the herd in the balcony. David took a moment to explain the idea behind the cartoon challenge, and show a "highlights" video of some of the beautiful moments that happened at the Texas campus that week. During the video, cheers of support and laughter erupted from the balcony. They obviously had a great time that week. As each of the PSA's screened that evening, the challengers cheered on each piece, shouting kudos to the various teams. Every one of the PSA's were unique and showcased the talents of each team. I was astonished by what they cranked out in one week. After the showcase of the animations, the audience had to vote, and it was a difficult choice indeed.

Fast-Forward one last time to the Sunday evening award presentation. Cartoon Challengers were encouraged to come down from the balcony to be easily accessible for the awards presentation. The votes had been tallied, a

KAFI Rocks (Bouwman) continued on 8

KAFI Rocks (Bouwman) continued from 7

winning team selected. It was the moment of truth. But it didn't necessarily feel like the moment of truth. Everyone involved seemed to be winners already, I was moved by the way they all seemed to support each other throughout this experience. When David announced the winning team, Claudia and the Four Swordsmen, a team from the Center for Creative Studies, the whole group (and the audience of course) erupted with applause. Their animation stated "Would you give a child half a present? Would you let a child ride half a roller coaster? Would you let a child go to school half dressed? Then why teach a child to only use half a brain? Save your right brain, support the arts." Of course the visuals that accompanied the dialogue were hilarious. They were presented with the first prize trophy. All teams who took the challenge were presented with a slightly smaller trophy to reinforce the fact that everyone put an extraordinary amount of work into their animations, and they deserved recognition and praise. I raise yet another glass of chilled white wine to the Cartoon Challengers! Cheers!

Seminars and Workshops

I wish I could provide a full report of the many activities that were scheduled for the weekend, but alas, I was not able to attend all of the 13 seminars and 5 software workshops offered. Word on the street is that attendees found the seminars to be very interesting, and the workshops to be very useful.

Ellen Besen: Integrated Storytelling - The Animated Genome Project

I've had the good fortune of meeting Ellen at several Ottawa Animation Festival events, and was very pleased to see that she had been recruited to share her wisdom with the KAFI festival attendees. Ellen teaches writing, storytelling, and animation at Sheridan College (yes the Sheridan College, famous for its animation department). In Layman's terms, Ellen's presentation focused on the many techniques artist and filmmakers use to disclose story elements, and character development through visual cues, not words. She mentioned that generally speaking, films reveal a cumulative message to their audiences, and place demands on the audience to decipher all these clues.

In this session, we took a closer look at the Disney classic, *Pinocchio*. I generally enjoy a good Disney classic...but after this presentation, I had a newfound respect for the artistic direction of this film. We looked at a couple of scenes with *Pinocchio* and the villain, *Stromboli*. After the viewing, with the guidance of Ellen, we discussed the elements of movement, color, use of props and location, and many other aesthetic elements used to infuse the scenes emotion and provide the aforementioned clues.

She pointed out the motion of *Pinocchio* was a blend between human and puppet, limited by his wooden joints, so that we'd not forget that even though he displayed human traits, he wasn't one...yet. We examined the use of the knife prop in the scene where *Pinocchio* is captured by *Stromboli* in his trailer. We noted the way it was used to delicately count money, or to cut and eat food, while other times the knife was wielded carelessly, posing a constant threat, without being the focus of the scene. I thoroughly enjoyed Ellen's discussion of aesthetics and character development. I could go on and on about the things I learned about *Pinocchio*. I was sad that I couldn't attend her other session where I hear they analyzed *Lady and the Tramp*.

Mike Belzer: Puppets to Computers

Mike Belzer is a new hero of mine. He's a stop motion animator who just happens to work for Disney...and it just so happens that he worked on...*THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS*. I love *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, it's one of my favorite mainstream stop motion features. In general, I'm a devoted fan of the stop motion technique, but have very little formal education on the production process. Mike Belzer's presentation was an incredible eye opener for me.

He started his presentation by giving us a little background information about his path to becoming a superstar, OK, maybe he doesn't see himself that way, but he has made a definite mark on the face of stop motion animation. Mike animated his first short when he was twelve, which he screened for us prefacing the piece by stating that it shows he wasn't born with the gift to animate stop motion beautifully, and we all have the potential to create animation as finely crafted as his current work with diligent effort. His first short was an adorable claymation. It was a western piece with tempers flaring in a saloon, and if I remember correctly, only the horse leaves the saloon unscathed. Then Mike shared his demo reel, and I nearly wept with admiration at the vast range of work he's done. In addition to *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, he worked on *James and the Giant Peach*, and *Dinosaurs*. He's worked on commercial spots, including the Pillsbury dough boy and Hershey's Kisses, and has produced his own shorts. One of my favorite Belzer shorts featured a grill tending mouse. The voice of the mouse was a sound byte of Orson Welles during one of his tirades while shooting a commercial spot.

After we learned a bit about Mike's background and skills, he shared many tips and tricks about the stop motion process, all the while telling us fun little production tales. Mr. Belzer is very charismatic, I could listen to him speak for hours. He showed us how to make

KAFI Rocks (Bouwman) continued on 9

KAFI Rocks (Bouwman) continued from 8

our own wire armatures, and even had a step by step handout available. He mentioned that while many main characters are animated using a fully "machined" armature, sometimes smaller roles, or even physically smaller characters use the wire armature he shared with us. He discussed some of the subtle things about motion in terms of balancing joints. He shared a lot of "secrets" of how things were done on the set of *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. Mike discussed the importance of being able to act out the motion, or reference actors for motion such as Chaplin. I didn't realize that the dance moves of Jack Skellington were based on Tommy Tune, and Fred Astaire!

Onto the "computers" part of Mike's seminar. I believe the first major computer animation Mike worked on for Disney was *Dinosaur*. He said that it wasn't terribly difficult to make the transition between stop motion to computer animation. He felt there were a number of similarities in how you construct your animation in each medium. He also pointed out early in his presentation that his drawing skills are very limited, and his strength lies in sculpting and modeling. Mike worked with the character "Baylene" in *Dinosaur*. I was intrigued by Mike's discussion of the difficulties he faced, and overcame in trying to create a dinosaur that was elegant, and motherly in terms of facial expressions etc. He also showed a clip of the actress who provided the voice for his character, Joan Plowright, and compared how much of the mannerisms of the character were inspired by the tapes of the Joan delivering her lines.

After his presentation, Mike was available for questions. He had set up a table of some of the models he's animated, several armatures and set dressings, and a huge book of production photos...all sorts of candy-like items for the stop motion enthusiast. I had a brief chance to chat with him after the seminar, a very friendly, knowledgeable and all around great guy indeed. Mike told me that a 9 year old had just handed him a business card stating that he was also a stop motion animator...very impressive, and good at networking at such a tender age!

John Fountain: The Industry, the Art form, the Neverending Headache - My Experiences from Kalamazoo to Hollywood

I'm proud to say that I knew John when he was a local celebrity. We worked together for David Baker at Classic Animation. John was a storyboard artist, and animator, and I was a production assistant. That was back in '94-'95...he's been incredibly busy and prolific since then! After loosing contact with John back in '95, I was astounded as I listened to his "adventures" of the past

seven years. John Fountain had worked his arse off to make it to the position he holds now as a director and supervisor at Nickelodeon Animation Studios.

John talked about his experiences in Michigan, beginning with his college years at Western Michigan University where he took a variety of classes from art to journalism, to acting. He said the fact that he didn't study one subject intensively gave him an edge against the competition out in L.A. He said that you must be able to bring something to a company that no one else can bring...an original drawing style, diverse skills, etc. While in K-Zoo, John created a comic strip which ran for seven years in the *Western Herald*. This was part of the reason for his local fame. Another important (and cool) accomplishment was his nationally distributed BULK comix anthology. It was during this time that he landed a job at Classic Animation...his first opportunity in the field.

He then discussed the sometimes crazy, sometimes unbearable, sometimes amazing path he took to get from his first entry level job in California to his current job at Nickelodeon. He said he owed a great deal of thanks to some friends who had let him crash at their pad, until he had a job, and his own apartment. When he moved out to California, he was scraping by on little cash, and doesn't know if he would have made it without their hospitality. John also mentioned the importance of taking risks, and getting out of your comfort zone. He said the bigger the risk, the better the payoff, and that misery can create some brilliant work :-).

I wish I could remember more of the specifics on the companies John worked at in California before Nickelodeon, but the names escape me. I do recall lovely tales of luck interwoven with his tales of hard work, and struggle. In one such tale we find John returning from an unsuccessful job interview...a job he basically moved to California hoping to get. As he left the interview, he remembered the World Animation Celebration was happening that weekend. It was getting close to the time that they were closing down the Celebration, but John thought, "I'll swing by and see if anything is going on." Since things were winding down, the folks at the door let him in free (saving him \$60), and he noticed several companies were still reviewing portfolios. Somehow, John managed to bypass the long line of animators waiting for a portfolio review at the Nickelodeon booth. The Nickelodeon recruiter gave John an encouraging review of his work, and then asked if John planned on going to the big "wrap" party that evening. John gave an affirmative reply, but wondered how much this would set him back. As he left the booth, he heard two people talking about having more tickets to the party than they needed. John snagged the opportunity, and made some

KAFI Rocks (Bouwman) continued on 10

KAFI Rocks (Bouwman) continued from 9

vital connections at that event. Whew!

A summary of John's experience...he worked as a storyboard artist for Klasky Csupo, then he was offered a position on the South Park movie. He knew that he'd have to get away from Klasky Csupo in order to get into Nickelodeon, so he took the job. After working with the South Park crew for a short span of time, he gets a call from Nickelodeon...can he take some tests to apply for a character design position? Well of course he can. So he lands a job at Nickelodeon...but he needs to give a months notice to South Park. For one crazy month, he was working 2 jobs each day on 3 hours of sleep...I'm raising a glass of a fine chilled white wine to you John. Your determination is awe inspiring.

You would think that John would be pleased with a delightful job in Character Design, but then, you don't know John. He continued to devise ways to get himself into the director's chair at Nickelodeon, pitching concept after concept. Until finally, he lands an opportunity to direct a pilot for a show he conjured up called "The Tantrum." The Tantrum features a young superhero who gets the "bad guys" to back down by throwing an ungodly painful tantrum...works every time. He shared "The Tantrum" pilot, and I was very amused. Now John directs a series on Nickelodeon called "The Fairly Odd Parents." It's a fantastic concept...a hilarious show...you must check it out.

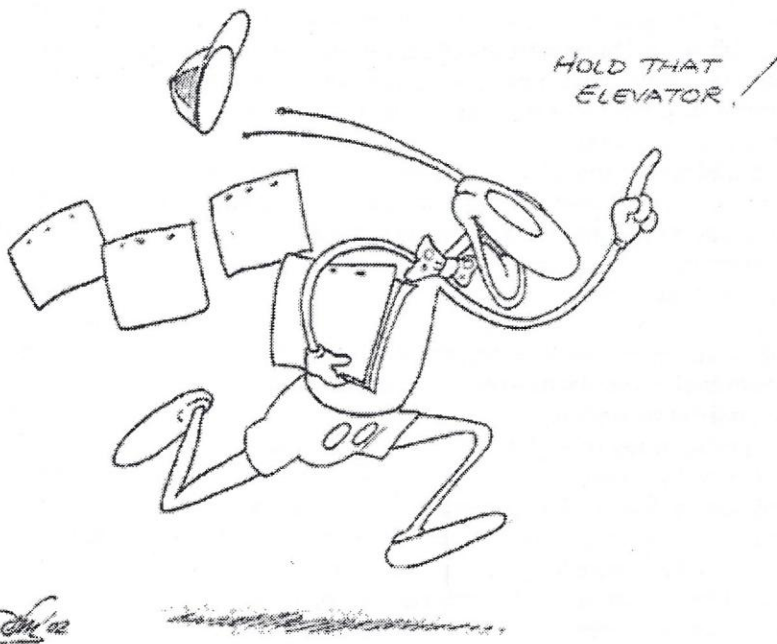
The other seminars that I sadly couldn't attend deserve a mention and a hearty round of Applause. Deanna Morse (professor at Grand Valley State University and independent artist/filmmaker/animation extraordinaire) did a presentation about her new DVD. The designers/producers of her DVD, Grey Christian and Eric Oehrl were also present. They discussed the making of this incredible collection of Deanna's work that not only showcases her talents, but is also designed to be used as a teaching tool. Jim Middleton's presentation "A Sound Theory - The Evolving Use of Sound in Creating Independent Animation" explored the use of sound in film and animation through the ages. Of course, he touched on the work of his hero, Oskar Fischinger. Jim also shared his vast knowledge of the use of public domain music, and gave out a CD of public domain music he compiled from his audio archives, including some selections played on a wax cylinder! Jim is a well known in the animation world as the "Animating

Apothecary." An incredibly talented, prolific, and fun artist he is.

Other seminars focused on drawing skills for animation. Brian Lemay, of Sheridan College, held a workshop on character design principles. A couple of my friends attended his workshop and said that he gave some great tips about coming up with new characters, working with poses, and he even shared a nifty trick that involved staring into a light...but don't try that at home without specific instruction. Representing the Max the Mutt Animation School, Tina Seemann discussed the connections between life drawing and animation. According to the KAFI program "Both animation students and professionals will learn something new from this studio experience. Bring your sketchbook!"

Well folks, this brings me to the end of Part One of my in-depth coverage of the Kalamazoo Animation Festival International. Stay tuned for the next installment in the Fall newsletter. I'm pouring the last bit of my fine chilled white wine in a toast to everyone involved with the festival. Cheers to your contribution. The festival could not have happened without the dedication of many individuals who were determined to see it through. One last thanks to David Baker...you rock Dave!

For more information on the festival, or to check out the Cartoon Challenge PSA's, go to the comprehensive KAFI web site: www.kafi.kvcc.edu



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