

Analytical and Articulatory Animation Analyses

A Special Edition from ASIFA Central – June 2023

HELP! I LOVE WATCHING ANIMATED SHORTS by Karl Cohen

*Part One of a Three-Part Series Providing an
Overview of Impressions by a Grand Master of
the Animation Community*

US Animation in the 1960s and '70s

Some of animations' most exciting moments are when you discover an inventive animated short that amazes you in some way. In the 1960s the age of well-made Hollywood 35mm theatrical cartoons for families came to an end, only a few animated features were being made, and an industry was just getting started to make limited animation shows for kids. What was exciting for a lot of people was the blossoming 16mm film industry that was producing well-made animated TV ads, non-theatrical animated shorts for schools and industry and there were individuals creating impressive experimental personal films. There were also several non-theatrical 16mm distributors who were rented and selling films to schools, libraries, art museums and other groups.

In the 1960s and '70s corporations and our government were funding a good number of those animated, educational shorts as well as live action films. One of the most innovative and accessible films is the part-animated *Why Man Creates* (1968) by Saul Bass, that discusses the nature of creativity (it was produced by the Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Company). It won the Oscar for Best Documentary Short Subject.

Another wonderful work is *Lapis* (1966) by James Whitney. It is a meditative computer generated film composed of mandalas changing in time to a soundtrack of a magnificent Indian raga played by Ravi Shankar.

A growing number of individuals were discovering that creating animation

on 16mm film was not only possible, but there was an audience and small market for this exciting form of art. In some cases, government agencies purchased prints to show the world that, in our democracy, Uncle Sam supported works ranged from traditional looking films to amazing experimental art such as Frank and Caroline Mouris' *Frank Film* (1973).

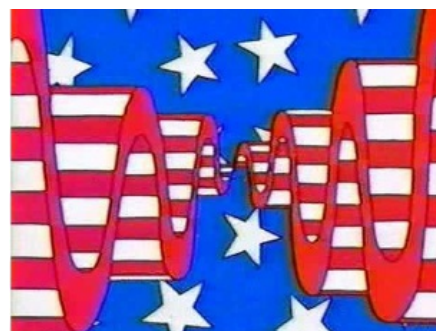


Frank Film (1973) - Frank and Caroline Mouris

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Prints of this animated collage comprising thousands of images were purchased by the US Information Agency [USIA] to be shown abroad. The whimsical mixed media film *Time Piece* (1965) by Jim Henson received similar attention.



200 (1975) - Vince Collins

In San Francisco, Scott Bartlett, Jordan Belson and others were using animation to develop new ways to express the personal feelings created when one uses psychedelics and/or meditation. They were creating works that expressed new kinds of aesthetic experiences, often using new emerging technology.

Vince Collins created mind blowing psychedelic animation. He won a Student Academy Award for his short *Euphoria* (1975), and the same year his proposal for a USIA grant was accepted. Later in 1975, a "far out" burst of energy was shown on screens around the world. The film he created with that grant was *200*, an experimental way to celebrate the 200th anniversary of our nation. Vince may not have known it, but the government was using the films they sponsored as positive Cold War

propaganda. It was intended to show, that in our country, we supported artistic freedom, while behind the Iron Curtain the state had the right to approve, censor and ban art.

*An Ugly Example of Cold War
Censorship*

An ugly example of censorship from behind the Iron Curtain happened after

Czechoslovakian Jan Svankmejer won the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival and the Grand Prix at Annecy for his film *Dimensions of Dialogue* (1983). He was living in a Soviet controlled nation, and unfortunately the unimaginative Czech bureaucrats, alarmed that an artist they didn't know was representing, at least in their minds, their country. Who was this strange surrealist and what did the film mean? They banned him from making any further films as his surreal work wasn't nice Czech propaganda that glorified the state. They saw his work as an embarrassment to the country.

Svankmejer's next film project was *Alice* (1988) his first feature. It was produced using money provided by

Channel 4 in the UK, just as the Czech government was about to fall. Since the government was about to collapse and he wasn't using the state's money, they left him alone.

Reagan Downsizes Govt. Spending by Cutting Budgets that Support the Arts

Oct. 1, 1981: That Day Is Finally Here -- Reagan's Budget Cuts Begin

By Thomas B. Edsall and Washington Post Staff Writer; October 1, 1981

Today, the first day of the government's new year, the Reagan administration's budget cuts begin to slice the edge off a vast network of domestic spending programs.

Oct. 1--the effective date for most of the \$35 billion in cuts--marks the reversal, at least temporarily, of two great waves of government intervention, the New Deal and the Great Society.

The exciting period of rich experimentation by independent filmmakers (c.1960-'70s) is mostly forgotten today. What most Americans would soon become familiar with is animation for features and TV.

The first major change occurred almost overnight with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. Once Reagan's appointees were in office, massive budget cuts were made to many Federal agencies, including the Department of Education, The National Endowment for the Arts. They slashed the budget for most forms of art. Funding for animation vanished and unfortunately that situation hasn't improved. The once thriving market for non-theatrical films for educational films quickly dried up. The lack of new films and the budget cuts for public schools to buy teaching materials were factors that contributed to non-theatrical film distributors going out of business. Some of these distributors were distributing experimental, inspirational and entertaining animation as well as educational films.

Animated Shorts for Teens and Adults

When I was about twelve, I discovered there was more to animation than the great Looney Tunes that I loved. The first of several epiphanies was my discovering the films of Norman McLaren from Canada. I had no idea such wonderful

films existed until my father took me to a large party where they showed McLaren's *Neighbors* (1952) and two of his abstract films drawn directly on film stock.



Neighbors (1952) - Norman McLaren

A few years later I had my first exposure to the delightful, quirky animation from Zagreb, and then Jiri Trinka's *The Hand* (1965, Czechoslovakia) that contained sly political content. Then in the early 1970s I joined thousands of other people who discovered incredible films in the annual *Tournée of Animation* programs. The compilations introduced styles and concepts from around the world that helped some Americans realize there were amazing alternatives to Hollywood cartoons.

When universities began to offer courses in animation, students discovered that they could learn the techniques needed to make their own meaningful works. Also a few colleges were beginning to hold film festivals that encouraged students to make works that they can submit to festivals. When I was working at the Toledo Museum of Art (1968 – 1971) I was able to attend several screenings at the Ann Arbor Film Festival which included experimental animation. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in LA established the Student Academy Awards in 1972. It gives film students an impressive competition to enter and there is an animation category. This contest, with many others, helped (and continues to help) open doors that can advance the careers of young animators. It also gives film distributors a chance to find out about works they might want to represent.

Being in the Student Academy Awards gives the film world a chance to discover tomorrow's hot talent.

A few of the outstanding films they have honored are *Lady and the Lamp*, (1979) and *Nightmare* (1980), both by John Lasseter. He is still the only student to win Student Oscars in Animation two years in a row!

Henry Selick's films, *Tube Tales* (1975) and *Phases* (1979), were finalists, and Pete Docter's *Next Door* won the Student Academy Award in Animation in 1990.

Lasseter, Selick, and Docter were graduates from CALArts, a school that obviously had both a great faculty and top students.

The Rise and Decline of Animated Shorts Programming

While getting a film shown in a festival is an important accomplishment, getting it into a touring film program is an even greater honor. The first program of independent animated shorts from Europe in the US was in 1964 when Pierre Barbin, the director of the Festival D'Anney (founded in 1960), was invited to visit the United States. Animation producer Les Goldman and UCLA Professor Bill Shull, with the help of the State Department, arranged for the visit. Anney was at that time the only festival devoted to showing animation, but since not everyone could go there, why not get some of the film and show them in LA?

Barbin brought a program of films from the 1963 Anney festival. The LA screenings were an important introduction to the animation community of an exciting vibrant form of animation that was being created in other parts of the world. The rumors were true that while the US was turning out mindless stuff made for kids TV, in Europe an exciting new form of animation was developing for adults.

The following year, animator John Wilson produced a similar screening at the Huntington Hartford Theater (later called the Doolittle Theater) in Hollywood. Former MGM animator Bill Littlejohn recalled, "It opened our eyes to the fact that these things are marketable, that there was an audience for this type of thing."

The success of the screenings resulted in Bill Littlejohn and Les Goldman, both members of ASIFA-Hollywood (then called ASIFA-West), asking Henry Hopkins, a curator at the newly opened LA County Museum, about working together to present their own event. Ward Kimball, two-time Oscar winner and one of Walt Disney "nine old men," pitched in to help create the

upcoming event that took place at the museum in 1967. That screening is considered to be the birth of *The International Tournee of Animation*, an important showcase in the US for international contemporary animated films (knowledge of how this event came about was forgotten until I recently found a copy of "The Tournee at 20" by Jon Hofferman, an unpublished manuscript that Prescott Wright had given me just before he died.)

Those were the first chances for a lot of people to actually see quality animation for adults that they had read about. These films were not being shown anywhere else in the US. The ASIFA members who were active in making these screenings happen included June Foray, Bill Scott, Bill Littlejohn, David Hilberman, Ward Kimball and Les Goldman.

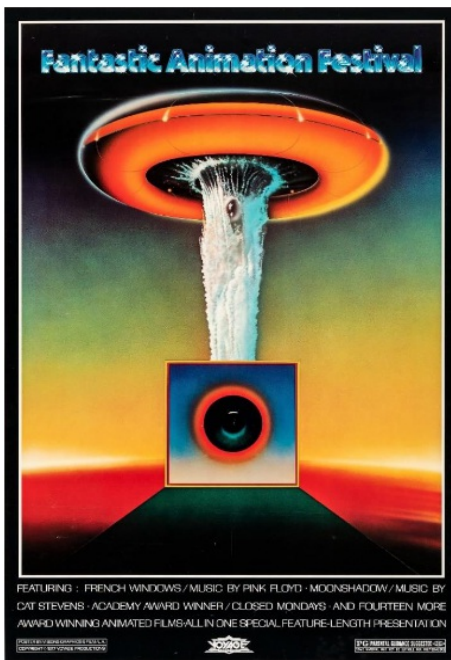
The second *Tourn e*, 1968, was an even greater success thanks to Herb Kosower, who taught at the University of Southern California (USC). He organized and ran the second, third and fourth shows.

As word of the showings spread, out of town screenings were requested. The first was at San Francisco State. David Hilberman, a former Disney animator and a founder of the UPA cartoon studio was teaching there.

As more requests were made, ASIFA-Hollywood realized they needed a dedicated manager to organize and run the *Tourn e* as a business. They chose Prescott Wright, a former fellow at the American Film Institute (AFI), who had just started his own film distribution company in San Francisco. Wright was hired in 1970 to organize and distribute the *Tourn e*. One his first screenings was at the San Francisco Museum of Art. Each year the shows were gaining in popularity, but in 1973 the LA County Museum dropped financial support for the production of the show. Wright had to assume that responsibility and one of the first changes he made was to commission a different animation student each year to create the show's opening title sequence.

In 1974, Wright wrote about the unique qualities of the films he was showcasing. He first explained that while the US had created an exceptional theatrical cartoon industry, "in Europe the animated film took a little different route. It was not intended primarily to please young audiences or simply to get people

seated for a feature film, but rather, the animated film was considered a medium of more serious expression intended primarily for adults. Few of these short films dealing with human foibles, politics, and humor in ironic and often wry ways were seen in the US until the mid-fifties and then as 'educational' films blending messages with very sophisticated art work. They were little noticed until 1962 when a film from Zagreb called *Ersatz* won an Academy award." (Published in *Magic Lantern*, Vol. III, Number II, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, 1974)



In 1975 the *Tourn e* was screened in 30 locations around the country, but the revenue it produced wasn't sufficient. About that time Gary Meyer, who had been a classmate and fellow teacher with Wright at SF State, was now co-owner of the Landmark theatre chain. Gary says he convinced Wright to let him premiere the show in LA at the NuArt and to let him show the annual programs in the chain's other theaters. Wright resisted the idea but he gave in. That resulted in the show playing to a much wider audience. The 16th program played in 120 locations.

Wright ended up directing the program for about 15 years. He attended festivals in the US and Europe (Annecy, Zagreb and others) to find works to show in his *Tourn e*. In 1975, he was also a founding member – and guiding light – of the ASIFA chapter in San Francisco. In 1976, he was a founder of the Ottawa International Animation Festival. He acted

as their first International Director.

In 1977, an exceptional program of animated shorts was screened on public television, the *International Festival of Animation*. It was hosted by British actress Jean Marsh. It gave a much wider audience a chance to see an impressive selection of films including *Closed Mondays* (1974) by Will Vinton and Bob Gardiner, the early computer animation *Hunger* (also 1974, a good year for genres) by Peter Foldes, and other important works. Unfortunately, despite favorable press, there wasn't a second season for the series.

In 1977, *The Fantastic Animation Festival* premiered with an excellent selection of films. It was even made available as a package to TV. They had an unusual looking poster to promote this fine show, but unfortunately, like the PBS series, there wasn't a second edition.

The Fantastic Animation Festival did result in something important: the two guys who had been hired to hand out flyers promoting the show figured out they could organize and promote one of their own. Mike Gribble and Craig "Spike" Decker were soon in business showing the *Spike and Mike Festival of Animation*. Spike and Mike became successful showing works from around the world.

Now there were two programs that were being shown around the country.

Spike and Mike's shows were a lot of fun if you liked being at an enormous crazy party or a rock concert where the host builds up the crowd's anticipation for something special. While the films were the main act, before the program, Spike got the audience boisterous and loud. Large balloons were tossed into the audience that could be batted about until they popped. Spike's dog even got on stage to pop several. Mike would dress flamboyantly with colorfully patterned suits, colored hair and a beard trimmed in curious ways. One time, half of his face was clean shaven and the other half sported a neatly trimmed beard. Spike loved walking around town handing out their colorful flyers for their show accompanied by several battery powered mechanical animals. They also commissioned artists they liked to do the covers of the show's poster and program. They were delightful showman and were articulate. They loved having fun and audiences joined in and loved it!

Spike and Mike ran their business like P.T. Barnham might have. They would

“four-wall” (rent) the theatre for a fixed price so they could keep 100% of the gate. To avoid complex accounting (ie, paying royalties) they bought prints of films for a flat fee for the life of the print (according to several filmmakers). They relied on their skills as showmen to promote their event which can be a risky way of doing business, but they were experts. They built up a loyal following everywhere they went, so when they came to San Francisco and other cities they often sold out large halls for several nights. They hired students, hippies and other cool dudes to hand out flyer on college campuses and at other places where their perspective audience might hang out.

They were also great at inviting special guests to appear on stage and to say a few words to the audience.

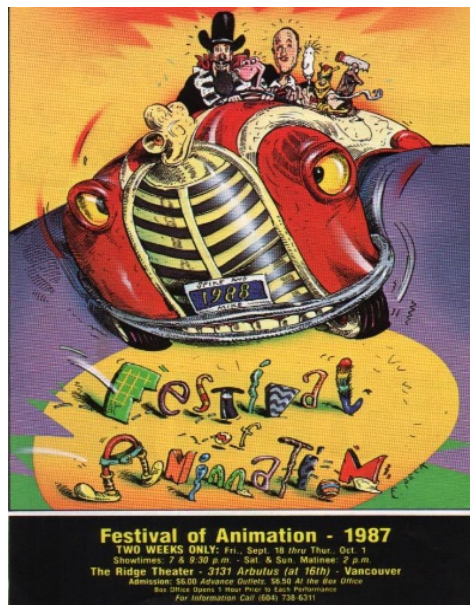
When the guest animator was a young John Lasseter, perhaps 100 people and I were invited to a party at their suite of rooms (lots of pizza and stuff to drinks – it wasn’t a high-society, catered affair). One time, Spike had to stay at the theatre, so he asked if my wife and I would take June Foray someplace for a really nice for dinner. I have great memories of their coming to town.

The availability of excellent animated shorts to see got even more interesting in 1985 when Expanded Entertainment was organized as a “sister” partner to Landmark Theaters. They distributed both live action features and collections of outstanding animated shorts.¹

Expanded created the *Animation Celebration*, a program in 35mm that featured an excellent selection of animation. This, and subsequent, editions were shown theatrically in Landmark Theaters and by other exhibitors. The shows received good reviews in the press.

Prescott Wright, who was creating and distributing the *Tournée*, told me his business was shrinking due to the

decline of venues showing 16mm films. He also wasn’t sure he could afford to blow up and successfully distribute a 35mm *Tournée* to commercial cinemas. Most non-theatrical animation was made and distributed on 16mm film at that time. In 1986 Prescott decided to sell his business to Expanded Entertainment and accept a job offer to help Bill Dennis, a former Disney Vice President, set up and run a new animation studio in the Philippines. Expanded/Landmark had the finances to create new programs and to blow up films shot in 16mm to 35mm for distribution to commercial movie houses.



The *Tournée* continued as a 35mm program and Ron Diamond programmed the 20th to 24th edition of the *Tournée*. They turned out to be a really fine shows and profitable, but after the 24th it was decided to end the series.

In 1988, Expanded released a cutting edge experimental show that Diamond programed with animators David Ehrlich and George Griffin. *Streams of Consciousness: New American Animation*, featured work by Sally Cruickshank, Marcy Page, Joanna Priestly, and other fine artists unknown to the general public. The *New York Times* gave it a nice review - *Taking an Animated Dip in Psychological Waters*.

Expanded also created something unexpected, novel and important in LA - a biannual animation festival. There were now several successful animation festivals in Europe and ones in Ottawa, Canada and in Hiroshima, Japan, but none here. The first LA Animation

Celebration was held in 1985 and it had 200 films. In 1987 there were 400.

Terry Thoren, the event’s producer, decided to turn the third edition into a really impressive event: the nation’s first major animation festival. The 1989 biannual opened with the world premiere of *Felix the Cat: The Movie*, a production from Hungary. There were more than 850 films from 35 countries vying for over \$95,000 in cash prizes (awards were given in 12 categories). They showed surreal classics by Jan Svankmajer who was in attendance (when we were introduced, our conversation was brief: his exact words were, “I do not speak English”).

They had a tribute to the late David Hand, who had directed films at Disney before producing his own cartoons in England. They screened the latest computer generated shorts (this was before Pixar’s *Toy Story* [1995], by John Lasseter), and lots of other exceptional work, including the best of that era’s music videos.

The festival turned out to include 39 events. It honored the great voice actor Mel Blanc. The former Disney animator Art Babbitt was given a screening of the British documentary *Animating Art* about him. (It was wonderful seeing Babbitt in-person, even though he was very frail.) Other honored guests included Don

Bluth (USA/Ireland), who screened lots of never-released footage, Yang Ding Xien, director of the Shanghai Animation Studio; Feodor Khitruk, president of the Union of Soviet Animators; and John Coates, president of TVC in London (they created *Yellow Submarine*). Coates won the festival’s Best Feature award for *When the Wind Blows* (1986). Another honored guest was Doug MacDonald, executive producer, English Language Animation, National Film Board of Canada.

Terry Thoren, the festival’s producer, told the press, “We believe that the animation industry in America needs a festival that focuses on its concerns. The foreign festivals like Annecy, have a flavor of really being for Europeans. Ours has developed more of a Western feel.”

At last, the US had a serious animation festival that showed lots of great films and members of the animation community came from several parts of the world to be part of it.

Unfortunately this wonderful

¹ Landmark Theaters Corporation was owned by Steve Gilula and Gary Myers with former Landmark theater manager and marketing head Terry Thoren as president of Expanded. Meyer and Gilula were Executive Producers and quite involved in running the corporation. Ron Diamond was hired to oversee the content and distribution of the animated programs.

event was so expensive to produce that subsequent events were continually downsized before it ended completely in the early 1990s

Expanded continued to explore new directions in programming. It created the controversial program *Outrageous Animation* in 1988, billing it as “the wildest cartoons ever.” Critics gave it mixed reviews and said it didn’t really live up to its name. It did however, delight the audience at the LA Animation Celebration in 1989, featuring *Lupo the Butcher* (Canada, 1987) by Danny Antonucci. Lupo hacks his body apart, first by accident, then seemingly out of spite for himself, while simultaneously screaming expletives. Despite the language, *Lupo* was considered tame enough to be shown on the Turner Classic Movies channel uncensored!

Spike and Mike also tried their hand at trying to shock and gross out the audience with their *Sick and Twisted Animation*, in 1990. The quality of most of their films was questionable, but it was something new and exciting for some - and disgusting for others. Sequels were produced and distributed on VHS, giving young animators a chance to create something crude that would actually be seen by thousands of people.

Broadcast TV would eventually expand its boundaries of what defines “acceptable” on TV with *The Simpsons*, starting in 1989, with cable pushing the boundaries further.

The 1992 Nickelodeon premier season of *Ren and Stimpy* in 1992 by John Kricfalusi, was totally outrageous and gross. Unfortunately, it was too extreme for the network, who tamed the show in subsequent seasons.

The internet had even fewer restrictions, so it has hosted extremely gross shows. One long lasting, twisted series was *Happy Tree Friends* by Aubrey Ankrum, Rhode Montijo, and Kenn Navarro, 2000-2016. Its success was tied to creating extremely small files for dial-up modem distribution, later enhanced for early DVD issues.

While Expanded released *Too Outrageous Animation* in 1995, they also released the *British Animation Invasion*, 1993, a very respectable program of sophisti-cated shorts. Critics responded by calling it smart, witty, daring and delightful. One wrote it “genuinely sustains your interest throughout.” It was packed with audience

pleasers including *Next*, by Barry Purves, 1990, featuring a realistic looking stop-motion puppet of William Shakespeare auditioning for St. Peter, performing his 29 plays in just five minutes using pantomime. Other exceptional works were the classic *Creature Comforts* by Nick Park from 1989, of which that the hard-to-please film critic Charles Solomon (*LA Times*) said, “This hilarious film gets funnier on each successive viewing.” The program also included *Body Beautiful* (1991) by Joann Quinn, where a bullied female factory worker triumphs as she puts her sexist male supervisor in his place.

Expanded and Spike and Mike increased the public’s awareness of independent animation by producing VHS tapes and laser discs of their shows to sell to the public. Spike and Mike’s company *Mellow Manner* produced a video of *The World’s Funniest Animation* in 1991, followed by annual releases of their *Festival of Animation* videos. In 1993, they also released the first of what would also become a series, the *Sick and Twisted* tapes. Landmark released a video tape of *Outrageous Animation* in 1990, followed by tapes of *British Animation*, and five different *Animation Celebrations*.

This great period of showing independent animated shorts came to an end in 1998 when the Landmark Theaters were sold to the Samuel Goldwyn Company and Expanded Entertainment vanished. The free internet was expanding rapidly and poorly animated Flash animation was becoming the hot new sensation. Its low resolution would have looked awful blown up on a big theater’s screen, but the public seemed to enjoy the often crude animation that was available on your home computer screen.

As for the Spike and Mike productions, Mike died from cancer in 1994. He was just 42. Spike carried on by cutting back on the number of new shows produced and trimming the number of screenings he hosted each year. He commissioned a few low budget shorts and he continued to go to international animation festivals.

To see what a Spike and Mike show was like, Kat Alioshin (who once worked for the duo) has produced and directed *Animation Outlaws*, a delightful documentary feature about Spike and Mike that captures the audience having fun. It also has highly regarded animators

talking about the unique festival experience that once existed. The trailer and the entire documentary are online.

In 1999 Ron Diamond’s *The Animation Show of Shows* premiered, but for several years it was mainly shown at colleges that taught animation, or at major animation studios, museums and at other places where he hoped the works might inspire and influence animators. Ron also runs Acme Filmworks in LA, creating TV commercials for national brands, animated sequences for features and other projects. It was Ron’s love of quality animation that led him to create his traveling show. He has expanded his presentations of it into commercial movie theaters, but unfortunately, when Covid 19 arrived he lost his audience. He is currently reviving the show.

Ron’s show always feature some of the year’s best animated works. They include significant, highly original, artistic, narrative and experimental shorts. They range from funny to serious intelligent concepts.

He is presently putting together the 25th edition which will feature some of the most outstanding shorts from previous shows.

Since 2007, a number of the films that have been in *The Animation Show of Shows* have also been released by Ron on DVDs at very reasonable prices. Amazon carries sets of them.

Ron also founded the internet’s largest and most important animation news and information website, *Animation World Network* (awn.com). It covers both the worlds of fine art and commercial animation. There are lots of feature articles, blogs, job and school listings and other things.

Terry Thoren, while he was working with Expanded Entertainment, founded *Animation Magazine*, a slick trade publication with lots of ads. It primarily focuses on news of domestic commercial features and television shows. You can also find animation news online at *Animation Magazine*, *Animation Scoop*, and *Cartoon Brew*.

This century has also had a short lived attempt to bring quality animated shorts to the public that was run by well-known animators. The first edition of *The Animation Show* was released in 2003 by Mike (“Beavis and Butthead”) Judge and Don Hertzfeldt. They organized the program to show their work the way they

were meant to be seen, on theater screens. The first package included other films they respected including wacky shorts by Bill Plympton. The program was seen in over 200 theaters plus they released a DVD of it.

The *Animation Show* achieved its goal of getting good works seen properly so they continued to put together really nice shows in 2005, 2007 and 2008. They featured fine work by Georges Schwizgebel from Switzerland, Joanna Quinn from the UK, PES and Bill Plympton from the US, and other works. It was a noble experiment where artists put together their ideal shows for the love of the medium. They didn't try to add "ringers" that might have attracted more people, but were not films they respected. Each year the public does get to see in movie theaters a program of the five Oscar nominated animated shorts. It opens a week or two after the nominations are announced and ends before the awards are given. They are shown with the live action nominated works. Five films isn't a good representation of the thousands of animated films made each year, but the brief run is great exposure for the films as the program is seen by several hundred thousand people. (It grosses over three million dollars at the box office.)

The show was originally organized by Carol Crow's Apollo Cinema, but an ill wind blew in and the program is presently distributed by another firm. By the way, only one of the five nominated films this year was by an animator from the US.

I hope this give you a good idea of why it has been so hard to see animated shorts in our country. A Hollywood feature can open on four thousand screens at once, but the shows just discussed were only shown in a limited number of venues. Many of the films are now online, but unless you know what to look for you are unlikely to find them. That results in only a tiny percentage of people knowing that truly remarkable shorts even exist. Part of the reason for that is Hollywood animated features and commercial TV series dominate the news and discussions that include animation. The wonderful independently produced shorts desperately need a home.

TV didn't develop as a showcase for independently produced animated shorts

Until the decline of Hollywood cartoons and animated educational shorts in the classroom, kids were used to seeing animation and they probably took them for granted. As a kid growing up in the 1950s, I knew what to expect before the feature. What I also looked forward to seeing were the special occasions, the two or three hour long cartoon marathons. TV wasn't showing much animation in the early 1950s except silent cartoons with soundtracks added and old public domain cartoons from studios that had gone out of business. I also watched Jay Ward and Alex Anderson's *Crusader Rabbit* (1950), the first limited animation cartoon series that was widely seen. It was a silly novelty.

Animation on TV got more interesting in 1955. Paul Terry sold his company, Terrytoons (Mighty Mouse), to CBS and Warner Bros. sold a package of black and white cartoons to a TV distributor. It included early Daffy Duck and Porky Pig cartoons. In 1957, Walter Lantz premiered the Woody Wood Pecker Show, and in 1960 the Bugs Bunny Show premiered.

Animation made for TV didn't really succeed as a business until Hanna-Barbara entered the TV marketplace with the *Ruff and Reddy Show* in 1957 and Jay Ward returned to TV with *Rocky and His Friends* in 1959.

Ward tried to inject adult humor that would go over the heads of kids, but advertisers stuck with wholesome Hanna-Barbara type shows that were free of adult content.

TV budgets were – and still are – based to some extent on what the sponsors will pay. While production budgets have grown better, TV is still chiefly making low budget animation for kids that runs before and after school and on weekend mornings. Chuck Jones, Hanna-Barbara and a few other producers had slightly larger budgets for the rare prime time/holiday special. TV animation for more mature viewers didn't arrival until *The Simpsons*.

TV animation became a place where advertisers could get reasonable rates for their ads which limited the cost of productions. You probably have fond memories of several shows you enjoyed growing up, but if you are reading this article you know the animation I'm writing about is intended to be seen by an older audience that seeks an alternative experience.

So where's the outlet today for independently produce shorts?

I hope I have clearly shown that it has only been a marginally successful struggle to educate the US public about the value of well-made, intelligent, animated shorts created by independent artists for open-minded adults. Several shows in the past have tried and, but while they did make a positive impression about the value of independent animation as a fine art, only Ron Diamond's *Animation Show of Shows* and the traveling shows of Oscar Nominated Shorts exist today.

The only other outlets in the US today that show independently produced animation are film festivals, and the labyrinth of *FilmFreeway* offers limited genuine opportunities for large-audience exposure.

Sure, five animated shorts are in the annual theatrical release of the Oscar nominated shorts and there is an occasional animated short on PBS, but that is a drop in a very big bucket. It is nice that Pixar and Disney put shorts by their up and coming directors in front of their features, but there are too many good shorts that never get the exposure they deserve.

Unfortunately our nation's best-known independent artists, including Bill Plympton, Signe Baumane, Nina Paley, and others don't have big budgets to promote their work.

As I write this, Signe has a new feature, *My Love Affair with Marriage*, winning festival awards. It is also being distributed theatrically in several European nations. Signe says that securing a theatrical release in North America has been a challenge that she hasn't solved yet. She says that due to the growth of streaming services and the pandemic, the habits of movie goers have been changing and that the changes have resulted in more movie theaters closing. She says "the art-film distribution structures in the U.S. are in the process of collapsing. The offers we have received so far from US distributors have only been for online options."



This is the first of three essays by Karl Cohen. The second and third will appear in conjunction with our ASIFA Central newsletter in July.

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