WINTER 2021 — • — ISSUE NO. 16

KEYFRAME

THE ANIMATION GUILD QUARTERLY

STEP INTO CHOREOMATION

STEP INTO CHOREOMATION

WINTER 2021

BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

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Chris Meledandri p.g.a.
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Directed By
Garth Jennings

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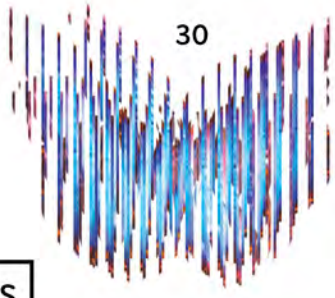

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MY FAVORITE JOBS

A FEW WEEKS AGO, AT A Q&A WITH A GROUP OF COLLEGE STUDENTS HOPING TO ENTER THE ANIMATION INDUSTRY, I WAS ASKED HOW MANY SHOWS I'VE WORKED ON. I REALIZED THAT I HAD NEVER COUNTED. AFTER REVIEWING MY RESUME AND THINKING BACK ON ALL THE PILOTS, SHORTS, AND EARLY CAREER FEATURES, I COUNTED AT LEAST 30.

THIRTY!

That's insane. How did I get here? How have I been so lucky to have had a hand in so many wonderful projects? They range from kids shows to very adult-targeted demographics. From educational to comedy to horror.

The jobs that I got the most satisfaction from were the ones where I experienced a happy crew more than just enjoying the actual content of the show. Happy crews don't happen by accident. They start from the top, with the showrunner and the executive producers setting the tone for the whole team. Open lines of communication and clear, reasonable expectations and goals give workers the ability to plan their day. Allowing the artists to contribute creatively and problem solve gives a sense of ownership in the project. It's a fine line to tread between the artistic and business sides of this industry. This is very much a business, but for success, the artists need to be invested to do their best work.

Throughout my career, with whatever show I'm working on, I try to find the sweet spot between the business side of giving the client what they want and the artistic side of why I pursued this career. Good leadership appreciates this balance.

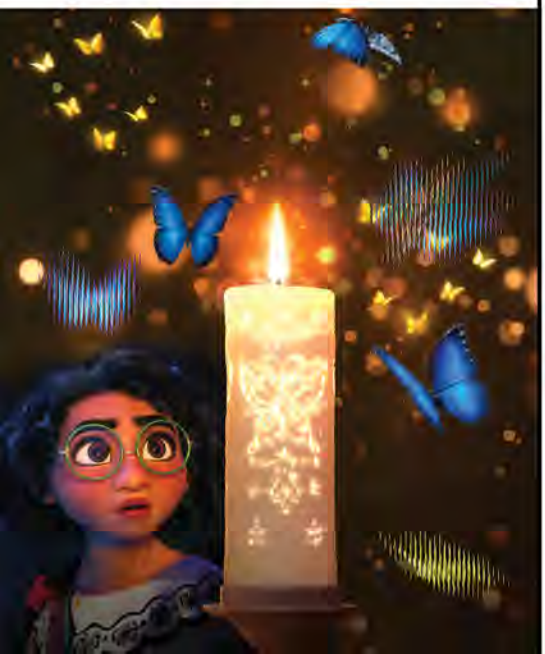
My advice to students trying to get into this industry is take a few business classes along with art classes. If they are offered, take production classes. Aim to understand the entire pipeline of making a show. It will inform your relationship with this thrilling, unpredictable career path. It can also make perfectly clear why being part of a union is so important. And it will give you a framework of how you should fit into any production. Not to mention leverage when negotiating your pay and benefits or help if workplace issues arise.

My favorite jobs were the ones with clear communication and artistic satisfaction. Those two things made for a happy crew and an enjoyable work environment. If I liked the show, then it was the whole package!

In Solidarity,
Jeanette Moreno King | President
The Animation Guild, IATSE Local 839

ON THE COVER

Our first interactive cover features the main character Mirabel from Disney's *Encanto*. When you slide the enclosed transparent overlay across the image, the butterflies will appear to animate.



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KEYFRAME

Editorial Director	Alexandra Drosu
Managing Editor	Kim Fay
Art Director	Jenn Logan/Studio Fuse, Inc.
Photographers	Martin Cohen, Tim Sullens
Contributing Writers	David Brain, Karen Briner, Jay A. Fernandez, Whitney Friedlander, Evan Henerson, Sonaiya Kelley, Paula Spence
Publishing Committee	Steve Kaplan, Jeanette Moreno King, Carrie Liao, Jason MacLeod, Jason Mayer, Paula Spence
Executive Board	Jeanette Moreno King (PRESIDENT), Jack Thomas (VICE-PRESIDENT), Steve Kaplan (BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVE), Paula Spence (RECORDING SECRETARY), Robert St. Pierre (SERGEANT-AT-ARMS), Jack Cusumano, Danny Ducker, Laura Hohman, Brandon Jarratt, K.C. Johnson (TRUSTEE), Crystal Kan, Carrie Liao (TRUSTEE), Mike Milo, Elisa Phillips, Stephen Silver (TRUSTEE), Emily Walus
Advertising	AFM/Ken Rose & Elizabeth Ferris (818) 312-6880 (cell & text) (866) 563-6193 (fax) krose@afmla.com
Editorial Offices	1105 N. Hollywood Way Burbank, CA 91505 (818) 845-7500

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We welcome editorial submissions; please contact us at editor@tag839.org or kim.fay@tag839.org.

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COMING TOGETHER

I CERTAINLY PICKED AN EXCITING YEAR TO START WORKING FOR THE ANIMATION GUILD. MOST SATISFYING HAS BEEN WATCHING GUILD MEMBERS RISE UP AND JOIN TOGETHER TO SUPPORT THE IATSE LOCALS—AND THEN CONTINUE THAT SOLIDARITY FOR THEIR OWN UNION CONTRACT.

This is a great lesson for me both in organization and in leadership, the latter of which is explored in two valuable articles in this issue. Animation industry and management experts share advice on the tricky art of delegation (**p.38**), and Supervising Director Ashley Long provides personal insights on how to be a supportive, inclusive boss (**p.28**).

While animation, like every job, has its complex workplace dynamics, it's also truly unique because it does not have worker bees. Every single TAG member is an artist or craftsperson in their own right, and *Keyframe* is a celebration of that—beginning with our feature on dance and motion in animation (**p.30**). This topic is so inspiring that our brilliant Art Director, Jenn Logan, couldn't help carrying it over onto our cover and throughout the magazine using a technique called picket-fence animation. Images appear to move by pulling a striped transparent overlay, or fence, across an interlaced image—a composite of six frames from a movement sequence. We hope you enjoy playing with our first interactive issue!

Along with talent, I've also discovered that TAG members share a strong sense of camaraderie. Whether it's through creating podcasts (**p.22**) or organizing car and coffee meet-ups (**p.19**), they pursue activities that foster connection. They also love to champion each other, which is why it's so fun to present the fourth annual holiday market (**p.44**), the perfect opportunity to support our Union kin.

Happy Holidays!

Kim Fay

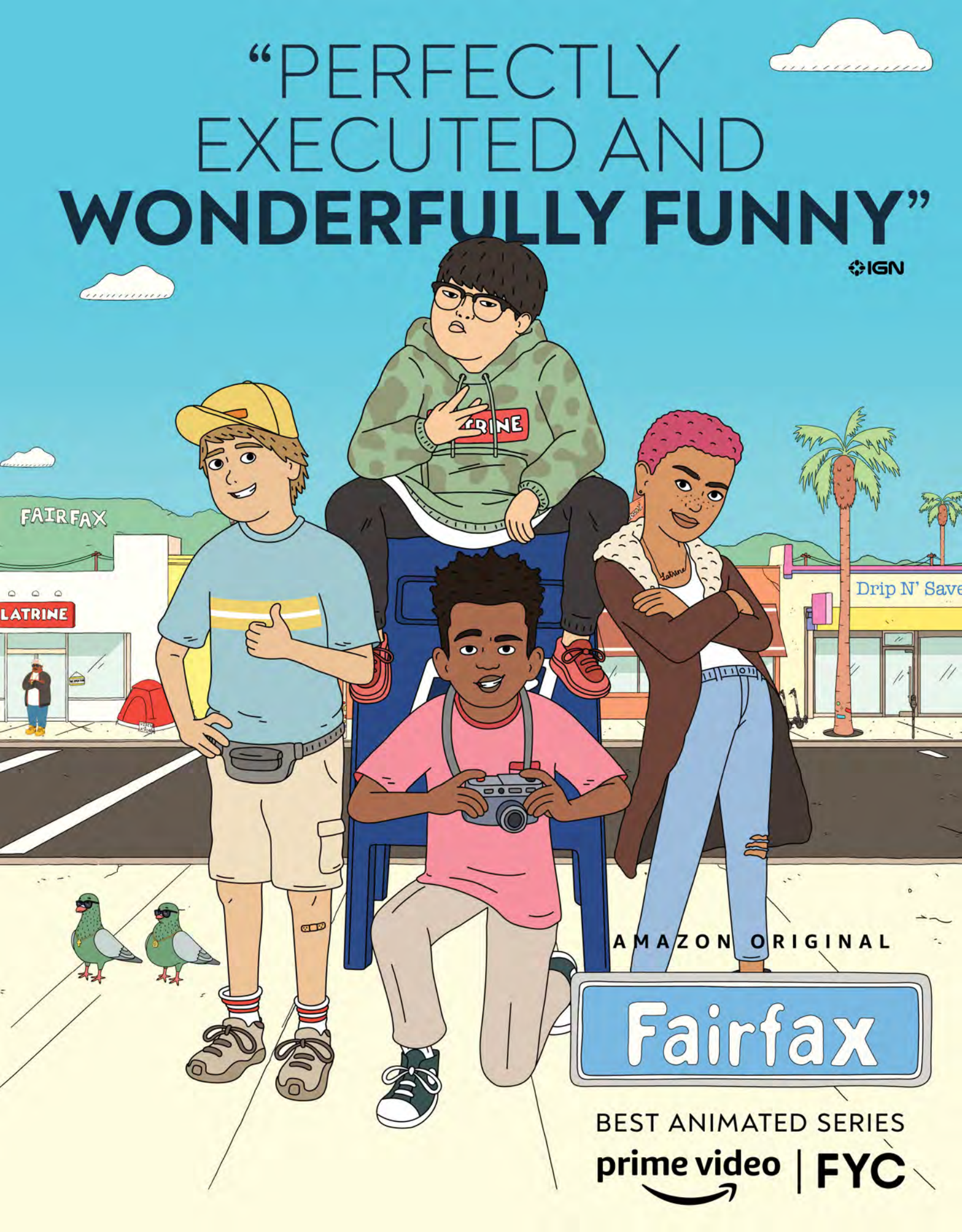
Kim Fay
editor@tag839.org

CONTRIBUTORS

EVAN HENERSON ("The Art of Delegation") is a lifestyle and entertainment writer based in Los Angeles. His work has appeared in *L.A. Parent*, *TV Guide*, *Orange Coast Magazine*, and the *Los Angeles Daily News* where he was a features writer and critic for nine years.

WHITNEY FRIEDLANDER ("Creative Legacies") is an entertainment journalist who lives in Los Angeles with her husband, son, daughter, and infamously ornery cat. A former staff writer at *Los Angeles Times* and *Variety*, she has also written for *Esquire*, *Marie Claire*, and *The Washington Post*, and currently contributes to CNN.

Freelance writer and author **KAREN BRINER** ("Animators in Cars Getting Coffee") grew up in Cape Town, South Africa where her garden was home to wild chameleons. Her most recent novel is *Snowize & Snitch: Highly Effective Defective Detectives.*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HAPPY ACCIDENTS

ARTIST: Matt Jones
TITLE: *Samitaur Building*
MEDIUM: Gouache on Canson paper
SIZE: 9" x 6"

When Matt Jones moved to L.A. to work at a small animation studio in Culver City's Hayden Tract, he would set out on his lunch breaks with a sketchbook to explore his surroundings. He was struck by the innovative architecture that had sprouted up in the old industrial zone, mostly designed by local architect Eric Owen Moss. Especially intriguing was the Samitaur Tower, an information tower and viewing platform. Its texture seemed to change throughout the day and into the night when it was illuminated, Jones says.

A storyboard artist for the past 15 years on feature films such as *Maya and the Three* and *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse 2*, Jones uses painting and sketching as a way to explore and familiarize himself with new environments. He calls his set-up "relatively lo-fi." Whether on his bike or in his car, he carries a bag containing a water jar, paint, brushes, paper, a metallic baking tray for a palette, and a GorillaPod to record the process on his phone. "I try to maintain spontaneity and embrace happy accidents," he says. "I'll do a quick pen-and-ink sketch to solve any perspective problems, then loosely pencil out the broad shapes on the Canson paper and get stuck into painting." For *Samitaur Building*, he used gouache paint on heavy Canson paper for the final result.

Samitaur Building is part of Jones' Iconic Places series, which can be found in the art book *AM3RICA* at his Etsy shop: **etsy.com/shop/MattJonesOriginalArt**.

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AMIE DOHERTY
HOLLYWOOD MUSIC IN MEDIA AWARDS
NOMINEE
BEST SONG
ANIMATED FILM
"FEARLESS (VALIENTE)"
Written By AMIE DOHERTY
Performed By
ISABELA MERCED & EIZA GONZÁLEZ
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE
Produced By KAREN FOSTER p.g.a.
Directed By ELAINE BOGAN
BEST ORIGINAL SONG
"FEARLESS"
Written By AMIE DOHERTY
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CREATIVE LEGACIES

WHETHER ANIMATING WITH HIS FIRST SUPER 8 CAMERA AT AGE 13 OR FOR A CIRQUE DU SOLEIL SHOW THIS YEAR, ERIC GOLDBERG PURSUES HIS PASSION WITH HUMOR AND DEDICATION TO THE CRAFT.

Like many animators, Eric Goldberg began to draw at an early age. His brother, Elliot, taught him how to sketch Woody Woodpecker when he was barely old enough for pre-school, and his knowledge expanded as he watched sequences that explained animation techniques on *The Woody Woodpecker Show* and *Walt Disney's Disneyland*. Soon, he was creating his own characters like Norman Noodnik.

"He still appears in my *Character Animation Crash Course*! I use him for a lot of the exercises, because he's very easy to latch onto and an easy character to draw," says the veteran animator and director, who is also known for his collection of vibrant-patterned button-down shirts designed and sewn by his wife, animator and art director Susan Goldberg.

From developing Noodnik to majoring in illustration at Pratt Institute, Goldberg went on to put his mark on now-classics like *Fantasia 2000* and *Looney Tunes: Back in Action*, and is currently part of a Creative Legacy team that was created to preserve the integrity of Disney Animation characters and stories. He is also a multiple Annie Award winner, including the Winsor McCay Award in 2010 for his career contributions to the art of animation.

Goldberg's childhood interest in animation grew even stronger upon receiving a Super 8 camera as a bar mitzvah gift from his parents. It was equipped with a cable release, allowing him to shoot one frame at a time. He was especially drawn to legends like Al Hirschfeld, Chuck Jones, and Mary Blair. He also remembers being awed by the beautiful animation in a National Education Television special about Richard Williams; in one section it looked to Goldberg as if Williams was painting watercolor on cel.

Eventually, Goldberg's aspirations met reality. In the mid-70s, Williams hired Goldberg for his first job on the live-action/animated *Raggedy Ann & Andy: A Musical Adventure*. Williams then convinced him to move from New York to London to work on commercials. Goldberg calls this his learning petri dish. "[Williams] would have great elder

ABOVE LEFT: By age 15, Goldberg was already on the path to becoming an animator. **LEFT:** Goldberg at work wearing one of his signature shirts designed and sewn by his wife, Susan.

statesman animators like Art Babbitt and Ken Harris spending summertime there. [And] every few weeks you had to switch graphic styles," he says. "One week, you would be animating woodcuts. One week, you would be animating *Tom and Jerry* style. One week, you'd be animating [like] Ronald Searle."

He says that Williams "instilled in all of us [that it] doesn't matter how well you hit the style, you still have to animate it. That was such a huge learning curve for me—to understand how the principles of animation could be applied to so many different graphic ideas."

After branching out to co-found his own London-based commercial studio, Pizazz Pictures, Goldberg moved to Los Angeles where he worked at Warner Bros. Animation for a few years before achieving his goal of landing at Walt Disney Animation Studios. "I love the humor in the Warner Bros. cartoons, and I also love how clear and direct [they] are, where the poses are very strong and dynamic and funny," he says. "Disney is more about the performance; the animation; the depth of the character, and all that kind of stuff. So I tend to fuse the two ideas through a lot of my animation."

This versatility can be seen in Goldberg's animation of the Genie in Disney's 1992 film *Aladdin*. Voiced by the late Robin Williams, the Genie is one of the most recognizable characters of that animation renaissance era. Goldberg's challenge was to find a way to design a character who could stand on his own from his real-life counterpart.

"We could have done the Genie just being non-stop funny, funny, funny, funny, funny. But he had to have some warmth and some depth to him," says Goldberg, who sat in on Williams' recording sessions and used the performer's comedy albums for reference. "I didn't want to slavishly repeat everything Robin did. The Genie had to be his own character. And to a certain extent, I wanted the movements on the Genie to be as wild as what Robin could do with his throat."

These days, Goldberg's status is that of the "elder statesmen" who guided his early career. He recently helmed *Disney Presents Goofy in How to Stay at Home*, a series of three short films offering a humorous look at how to make the best of pandemic challenges. Along with creating the concept, stories, and animatics, he directed a team in hand-drawing the classic character.

He's also representing the Creative Legacy team as they work with Cirque du Soleil and Walt Disney Imagineering on *Drawn to Life*. This live performance at Walt Disney World Resort features ten acrobatic acts alongside new animation from artists led by Goldberg.

Drawn to Life is the story of a young girl who discovers an unfinished animation started by her Disney animator dad, and as the father of two now-grown daughters, Goldberg says, "there are a lot of things in the show that are reflective of our family, and so I feel very connected to it."

While it may seem that *Drawn to Life* is bringing Goldberg's career full circle, in fact it's just one more rich chapter in his own creative legacy.

— *Whitney Friedlander*

TOP: A performance incorporating animation in Cirque du Soleil's *Drawn to Life*. **ABOVE:** A scene from the "Learning to Cook" episode in *Disney Presents Goofy in How to Stay at Home*.

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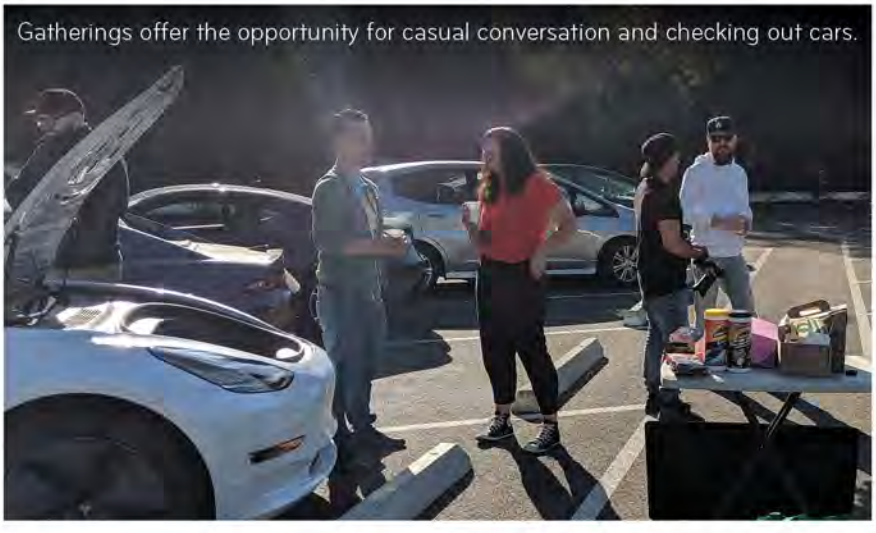
ANIMATORS IN CARS GETTING COFFEE

AT THE CARS & COFFEE MEET-UPS, GUILD MEMBERS COME FOR THE CARS AND STAY FOR THE CAMARADERIE.

On certain Saturday mornings, if you're in Griffith Park near the carousel, you might spot a small group of Animation Guild members gathered in the parking lot, sharing coffee, doughnuts, and stories about their cars. You've just stumbled upon one of the Cars & Coffee meet-ups that have been facilitated for the past three years by Roger Oda and Susan Nguyen.

Oda, a background designer on *My Adventures with Superman*, and Nguyen, a storyboard artist on *The Casagrandes*, originally bonded over their appreciation of cars when they were both at DreamWorks. Nguyen says, "I would communicate on the internal forum with the same handful of people about cars, including Roger. We would share fliers for car events and local meets, and eventually we came up with this wild idea of meeting in person!"



Gatherings offer the opportunity for casual conversation and checking out cars.

Prior to that, when Oda was working on *Motorcity*, he also met colleagues who were into cars. "There are quite a few transportation design people who work in animation—so there's a lot of people who know actual car design philosophy."

Oda says the Cars & Coffee events seemed like a natural development because of Southern California's car culture in Burbank and Glendale, where many animation artists and writers work. He also likes having a casual activity where people from the industry can gather without needing a serious purpose for meeting up. He notes that in the Guild, many events are anchored in advocacy issues, adding, "I do think it's important that we meet under other circumstances."

Nguyen, in turn, views the meet-ups as "a fun way to make new connections beyond our crew or studio, as well as a great opportunity to get to know each other as people beyond the workplace. Through these kinds of events we can become better connected and, I think, better humans."

The events usually run from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m., and Oda and Nguyen make sure coffee and doughnuts are available as they direct cars into designated areas in the parking lot. "Once a few roll in, we walk from car to car, checking details out, hearing wild car stories, sitting inside cars you'd never sit in otherwise," says Nguyen. "Once in a while, you might even get to drive someone else's car if you're lucky."

For Oda, his love of cars goes back to his childhood. In fact, he says, his desire to be able to draw cars well was how he developed his art skills. He used perspective in those drawings which became useful in background design.

As for Nguyen, she longed for a Honda del Sol from an early age. She was fascinated by the engineering and design in older Hondas. During the pandemic, she credits drives in her three Hondas with keeping her sane, reminding her that she wasn't completely trapped by the lockdown. While she has dreams of "rescuing" as many vintage Hondas as possible, she highly advises people "to collect things that are smaller and cheaper."

The spectrum of cars that shows up at the meet-ups is always exciting to Nguyen—from vintage MINI Coopers to '90s JDMs [Japanese Domestic Market] and beyond. She loves hearing the stories of how people became partial to a particular make or model, as well as the emotional connections they have with their cars. At a recent gathering, she heard about a driver who is loyal to her Audi because she once came out of a serious accident unscathed. And Oda has sold two of his cars to friends over the years, happy to know he'd see them again in studio parking lots. "I think car owners get attached, and if they really like something they want to know that it's going to go to a good home," he says.

Just as the technology of a particular time influences how animators work and draw, Oda notes that cars tend to have a generational aspect to them. He grew up in the '90s, and along with several colleagues, was influenced by the import car scene. "Now those cars are getting older, suddenly becoming the classic cars," he says. In contrast, there are older members who like European cars or roadsters, which were popular with their generation. At meet-ups, people with the same car tastes tend to congregate: Porsche owners gather to check out the differences between their models, or Honda people dive into their own deep discussions.

Meet-ups usually draw between 10 to 20 people, from newcomers to industry veterans. Some are reticent at first about joining, but Nguyen says, "You don't even have to drive a 'cool car'—if you vaguely appreciate automobiles, you're more than welcome to join us!" And Oda explains that the gatherings are mostly about socializing. He enjoys that people have shown up who don't necessarily have a car that they love, but because they just wanted to hang out. A few attendees even bring their kids.

While the Cars & Coffee event is for Guild members, "ensuring a safe and welcoming space for our fellow nerds, artists, and gearheads," according to Nguyen, TAG members have brought friends and car enthusiasts from other locals, creating a unique bond across unions.

The pandemic put a pause on in-person events for a while, as Oda and Nguyen navigated how to proceed responsibly. Mission accomplished, the meet-ups are back at Griffith Park and sometimes The Animation Guild parking lot on a hopefully quarterly basis.Learn more about attending on the group's Facebook page: **@CarsandCoffeeLA.**

– Karen Briner

PREVIOUS PAGE, TOP LEFT; THIS PAGE:
All types of cars are welcome and admired by the meet-up's enthusiasts.

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10 TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PODCAST

WHEN IT COMES TO HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL PODCAST, TAG MEMBERS SPEAK FROM EXPERIENCE ABOUT PLANNING AHEAD, LEAVING SPACE FOR THE UNEXPECTED, AND KEEPING THE FOCUS ON HAVING FUN.

BE PREPARED

When The Animation Happy Hour team started out, they didn't plan ahead at all, according to **Garrett Lewis:** "It caused the episodes to kind of spiral and peter out." They now create an outline "so we at least have a roadmap before we record."

PREP YOUR GUESTS

Katie Low recommends sending questions to guests in advance, and letting them know they can take breaks and re-record sections when necessary: "All of this helps to put our guests at ease and have as natural a conversation as possible."

GO WITH THE FLOW

Kendall Michele Haney also uses an outline but says: "Don't feel pressure to stick directly to it. Make sure you go with where the conversation takes you naturally." Listen to your guest, she suggests, rather than think ahead to the next question you're going to ask.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Because Cassie Soliday's target audience ranges from juniors in college to those a few years into the industry, she anchors her podcasts on relevant phases of the artists' journey. **Ben Girmann** suggests taking this one step further and encouraging listener engagement. When taking questions from the audience, he and his partners give a shout-out to show that they value their listeners' opinions.

GO DEEP

Many podcasts tend toward career highlights, but **Soliday** tries "to balance that out by also discussing the struggle and resilience needed to build that highlight reel." If guests are comfortable having the conversation, she addresses darker moments of the journey like uncertainty, depression, and anxiety. While working in animation is fun, it's also hard work, and she wants her audience to be prepared to tend to their own wellbeing.

TALK IT OUT

"We work in an industry where subjectivity is baked into the fabric of almost everything we do," says Girmann, "so I love when we can get a few different opinions on a particular subject and talk it through on the podcast." He feels that this approach offers listeners a glimpse into the day-to-day nature of working in the industry.

BE REALISTIC

Lewis warns against over-promising a release schedule that you can't deliver. "Don't make it a second job," adds Low. "When we started we were really intense about posting twice a week on every single social media platform." It was too much work, and now they focus on keeping the process as fun as possible. As Soliday notes, "There are a handful of animation podcasts out there, and I'm grateful for those that post regularly as well as every once in a while. Give what you can, when you can. It's [about] quality, not quantity."

KNOW YOUR WORTH

"Don't be too hard on yourself," Haney says. "You either started this as something you thought would be fun, something you wanted to be a (free) resource for people, or both—so just keep that as your focus." Soliday adds, "Whether you have one or 100K+ listeners, something YOU say or make can improve someone's day or level up their knowledge to help them get through their current or upcoming hurdles on their creative journey."

AVOID PERFECTION

For the editing process, Haney feels that it's okay to leave in some "ums" and awkward chatter because it helps the podcast feel real. She says she was too precious with early episodes, and now that she doesn't worry about perfection, it saves her time, not to mention the pain of always overthinking things.

SPREAD THE WORD

One way Haney promotes her podcast is to make one-minute snippets of each episode to share on social media the day before the episode airs, "to give people a taste of that episode [and] guest so they become interested in listening to the full thing." She recommends the website Headliner, which she says will do a lot of the work for you.

POD PEOPLE

inkandpaintfolk.podbean.com
Cassie Soliday, Writer

In college Cassie Soliday loved her History of Animation class, but lamented the lack of women in the curriculum. When she broke into the animation industry in 2014, she started interviewing woman animators, and the next year she officially launched her podcast to serve as "a living archive of contemporary women and non-binary folks working in animation," ensuring these artists won't be lost to future generations.

typintoons.com
Kendall Michele Haney, Writer

A fan of podcasts about writing, Haney noticed how rarely (if ever) they touched on animation. She also received numerous emails asking about her job, so she decided to create a space "to answer some of those questions on a larger scale." Each episode focuses on a writer and their journey, along with a deep dive into a single topic such as writing a first freelance episode or serialized storytelling.

animationhappyhour.com
Garrett Lewis, Character Animator
Katie Low, Character Animator
Ben Girmann, Character Animator

Like Haney, this trio received emails from students at a volume exceeding their ability to answer individually. As a result, they created their podcast about how to break into all aspects of the animation industry. In the spirit of happy hour, they enjoy drinks during their friendly, conversational interviews, while also pursuing their more formal goal to "both democratize and distribute information more efficiently."

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WRITE ON!

TONS OF MEETINGS, PITCHING WILD IDEAS, AND HONING THEIR CRAFT—IT'S ALL IN A DAY'S WORK FOR THESE STAFF WRITERS ON ANIMATED TV SHOWS.

MAX BEAUDRY

BABY SHARK'S BIG SHOW!

After a stint as a Production Intern on Nickelodeon's *T.U.F.F. Puppy*, followed by a work and travel abroad break, Beaudry landed back at the studio as a Production Assistant on *Dora and Friends*. Working on his own stories and keeping an eye out for opportunities, he joined *Bunsen Is a Beast* as a Script Coordinator, where he earned his first writing credit. After that came freelance projects until his first staff job on *Muppet Babies* in 2018.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR JOB?

Being a staff writer is like being a pizza maker. I'm Italian, so just go with me here. We take a blob of dough (an idea), then we toss it around, spin it in the air, and slam it on the table (expand the idea), throw on the special toppings (specify the jokes and story points), then toss it in an oven and hope it comes out perfect (writing the script). Sometimes the customer says, "This pizza's delicious, but it could use more pepperoni and less basil (network notes)." So we change out a few ingredients (sometimes a lot), and we ultimately wind up with a pizza that everyone is happy with (the final script).

WHAT DOES YOUR WORK DAY LOOK LIKE?

A typical day starts with a writers' touch base meeting in the morning. Our Story Editor will check in with everyone to see where they are in the process of their respective episodes. The rotation usually works out so that someone is [working on the] premise, while others are on outlines and scripts. Wherever I fall in the rotation, that is what I'm working on that day.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF BEING A STAFF WRITER?

I love that in this one arena, the writers' room, we are encouraged to pitch the weirdest, silliest, darkest, most action-packed ideas that float through our brains. I also really love seeing other writers' processes—it's comforting. When you only read someone's script, you don't get a true sense of the hurdles it took to get to the end. But when you're deep in the trenches with talented writers, you realize that they also start on a blank page and think, "Welp, here goes nothing..."

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR ASPIRING STAFF WRITERS?

Keep writing. Even I still get agita whenever I start a new script. But you just have do it. And don't judge yourself! Seriously. You absolutely need to be open to critique, but it's imperative to find the balance so that you write something that's true to you.

MARVEL STUDIOS
WHAT IF...?
FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION
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Disney+

MEREDITH KECSKEMETY
THE LEGEND OF VOX MACHINA

The head of Titmouse knew that his Executive Assistant, Kecskemety, wanted to write—and when a job for a writers' assistant opened on a new show, *The Midnight Gospel*, she was given the chance to freelance on an episode. During this time, a group she knew at Critical Role was trying to launch *The Legend of Vox Machina*. She reached out, "shamelessly asking if I could be a writers' assistant." By season two, she had been promoted to Staff Writer.

WHAT DOES YOUR WORK DAY LOOK LIKE?

Generally, when we are in the writers' room, we all gather (on Zoom at the moment) for a few hours in the morning and try to break an episode, listing out broad story beats. Then we usually take lunch and revisit the episode in the afternoon with fresh eyes. As we start to turn in episodes and get notes back from the network, we will have additional meetings to address those notes throughout the week.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF BEING A STAFF WRITER?

I like that I get to pitch the craziest idea of any scenario and blue sky solutions to story problems. Since writing is the first part of creating any show, it is literally the time when anything goes.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES?

I think the hardest part for me, having come from production, is being so far removed from the rest of the animation process now that I'm a staff writer. I encourage anyone who is in a writers' room to go out of their way to form a rapport with their production team because it can only make your writing better.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR ASPIRING STAFF WRITERS?

Always have a solid writing sample ready because you never know when someone is going to ask to read you. Make sure it is a strong representation of your voice and really showcases what you can bring to the table.

PAUL CHANG
THE GHOST AND MOLLY MCGEE

After graduating from college with "a liberal arts degree and a whole lot of panic," Chang chose a safe career path as a corporate consultant. But his passion was comedy and writing, so he spent nights scribbling stories in hotel rooms while on the road for work. The turning point was a CAPE New Writers Fellowship that he calls "a crash course on the industry," helping him refine his writing sample and getting him a meeting that led to his being staffed on *The Ghost and Molly McGee*.

WHAT DOES YOUR WORK DAY LOOK LIKE?

Most of my time is spent writing episodes at various stages—a one-page premise, an outline, or a full draft of a script. On any given day I might also have: a story break meeting (where the writers figure out the beats of a story as a group), a notes meeting (where the writers get notes from studio executives), or a punch-up meeting (where the writers do a table read of a script and pitch jokes to make it as funny as possible).

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF BEING A STAFF WRITER?

I love breaking stories in the writers' room. I feel so lucky that I get to hang out with a bunch of funny people and create stories that will hopefully bring a little joy into people's lives. Also, pitching a joke that makes the room crack up always makes my day.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES?

Early on, the biggest challenge for me was learning the voice of the show and how best to bring the showrunners' vision to life. Another challenge, having been on the show for a while now, is coming up with fresh story ideas that fit the show, but don't feel too similar to episodes we've already done.

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR ASPIRING STAFF WRITERS?

Join or start a writing group. It's a fantastic way to get notes on your scripts, build a writing community, and stay motivated with deadlines.

BIG BOSS ENERGY

Following the recent possibility of an IATSE strike and the idea that TAG might also conduct a strike authorization vote, Supervising Director Ashley Long heard rumblings about hostility on productions, persistent crew bullying, and people in positions of power who reacted to potential staff walkouts with threats of replacement or retaliation. This motivated her to share her perspective on the role a supervisor can play in fostering a respectful, supportive work environment.

Working as a Supervising Director for the last four years has been the most fulfilling job of my 16-year career. You might be thinking, "Well, of course! Top of the heap, bigger pay, ultimate power!" Sure, those factors have their appeal. But can I tell you the REAL reason this is my favorite job? Being a Supervising Director has shown me that I am—*gasp!*—a people person.

I consider myself fortunate to have worked with the same core group these four years. The reason I have returning staff season after season isn't because our schedule is great, or because the pay is high (LOL)—it's because people want to work somewhere they feel genuinely cared about. That is an element I personally feel is essential to great team management. So what does caring for your crew look like?

HIRE A COMPATIBLE MIX

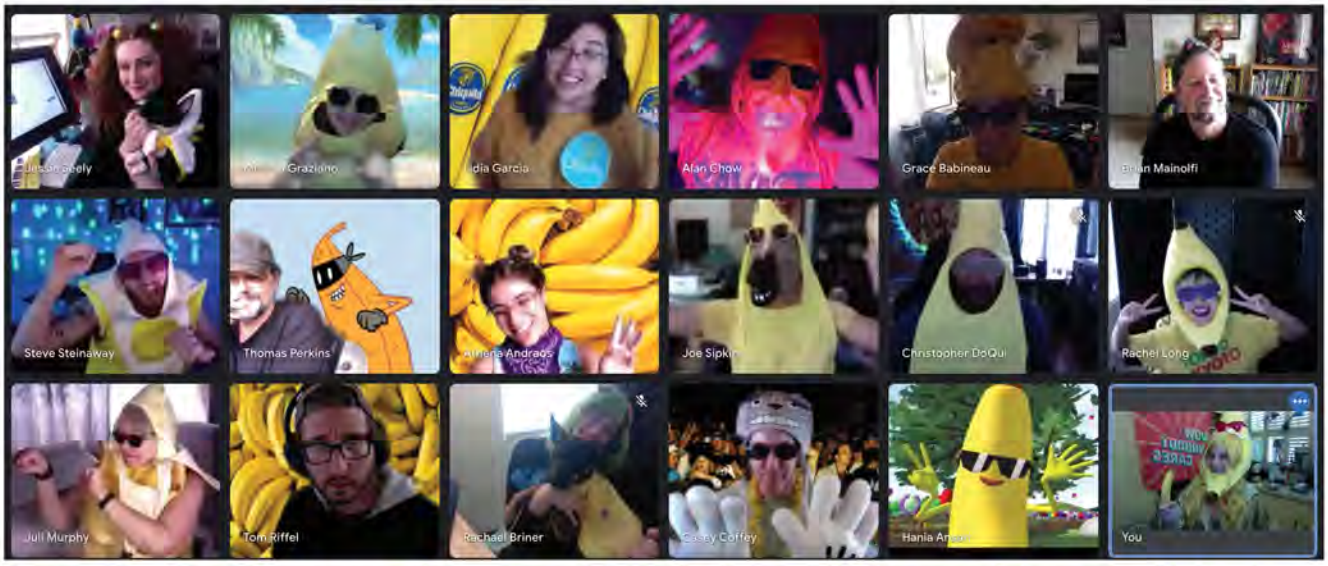
Your work environment is a living entity that you need to keep healthy, and I've found one key is to interview candidates in addition to reviewing their work. Gain an understanding of where they're coming from and their communication style. Imagine candidates interacting with your existing staff and evaluate their fit within your larger crew dynamic on a person-to-person (and not just skill) level. Seek to cross-pollinate veterans, greenies, old pals, and fresh faces who all share a common work ethic and attitude toward the project.

BE AWARE OF YOUR CREW'S WORKLOAD

Don't use being high on the ladder as an excuse to be oblivious to knowing if a reasonable amount of time has been allotted for a job or where your pipeline bottlenecks are. The studio's answer to problems is often simply "make staff work faster." This is your cue to say "no." Checking assets off a list is good, but having a crew that wants to work for you again is better. Find solutions that balance the production's goals with keeping your team's sanity.

TRUST YOUR LEADS

Collaborate with your directors and department heads to address problems–you hired them for their experience, so respect them by involving them in decision-making where it applies. It is vital to recognize that empowering those under you does not dis-empower you. Perhaps you'll need to make the final call, but employees who get the chance to be heard and feel agency to contribute are far happier than those just being moved around like game board pieces.



Long and her crew vote on costume themes for each Friday leading up to Halloween and dress up weekly to enjoy the whole month. They started this the last year they were in-house and continued the tradition over Zoom.

STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR CREW'S MORALE

Supervisors are busy, but make a point to engage in crew group chat and show up at crew-driven (not only studio-driven) fun events when you can. It's also important to know where your crew members are emotionally. If an artist is going through a bad breakup, it may explain a dip in their work output. Without this context, you might instead find yourself frustrated with this person and assume they're slacking off, which can send you on a tear of other wrongful assumptions that only hurt the process and give you an unnecessary headache. If crew members trust you enough to talk to you about what's really going on with them, you can strategize around unforeseen issues and avoid both burnout and missed deadlines. Crew trust takes time to build and requires consistent, active participation from you, but it pays off in dividends. Foster that trust, and never abuse it.

NEVER FORGET WHAT IT WAS LIKE IN THE TRENCHES

When I became a Supervising Director, I inherited a pipeline based on a previous show by the same show runners. The first thing I did was inventory the things that made me miserable on that show and present effective alternatives. I didn't want to be up until 3 a.m. fixing boards like my Supervising Director, nor did I want my episodic directors and board artists working every weekend the way I had. I can only roll my eyes at people who get promoted into power and feel that those under them should have to suffer as they did. What kind of insecure garbage is that? Protect your crew from the pressure of unpaid overtime. Educate them on their contract and empower them to enforce it. Stand up for what's right and fair, even when it means uncomfortable conversations with your producer, showrunners, or studio. Take care of your people, and they will feel motivated to deliver for you.

ASK WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

If a crew member is overwhelmed, ask what would help their situation. You may not be able to make their deadline go away or do their work for them, but identifying a small attainable way to release pressure can make a difference. Some people just need to feel heard—make time to listen. Or if someone has physical work piling up, I might offer to thumbnail one board sequence or to start creating models for their SB Pro library to give them a boost until they can take it over. Without overextending myself, doing these things can make a HUGE difference to the person feeling swamped. In exchange for an hour of my time, I've kept the pipeline moving and built loyalty with the person who was struggling. Crews want to work for the captain who is willing to help row the boat.

Am I asking a lot on top of the standard job description functions you already perform? Yes, I am. Caring about people is a ton of work—it's also my favorite part of this job. I've never had a greater sense of kinship with people than I do right now, with my ride-or-die crew built on mutual respect. It's up to those of us in leadership to set the tone on our crews and be instigators for positive change for Guild members. This is how we get better working conditions; this is how we build community with our peers. Being effective in a leadership position is an ongoing conversation between you and your crew that requires active maintenance and earned renewals of trust. It's never too late to start that conversation.

For *Encanto*'s Luisa, a dance style was chosen that showcases her physical strength.

STEP INTO CHOREOMATION

BY KIM FAY

The art of animation can't be separated from the art of movement. Characters are animated, after all. But there are degrees of motion. Nodding, turning, and walking are one thing, while dancing is quite another, requiring an exciting elevation of artistry.

Choreographers are nothing new to the process of crafting animated musicals, but as technology advances, so does the desire to one-up every aspect of making a film. For the Disney musical *Encanto*, that meant having a choreography consultant on hand throughout the entire production for the first time in Disney history.

An ambitious tale of the family Madrigal, living in an enchanted place called Encanto in the mountains of Colombia, the movie leaned heavily on its choreographers because "it was a huge project to be able to tell clear stories about the 12 main characters," says Co-Director/Co-Writer Charise Castro Smith. "Movement definitely contributed to separating them."

Each Madrigal child, with the exception of central character Mirabel, has a magical trait, such as seeing the future or controlling the weather. But to differentiate them further, walking tests were done early in the process, and according to Animation Supervisor Michael Woodside, there was a strong push to integrate music into the way the characters walked.

Vivo images courtesy of Sony Pictures Animation. *Encanto* and Marge Champion images courtesy of Walt Disney Animation Studios.

One of the reasons for this is that in Colombia music is always on, and people are always dancing—even if a person is just crossing the kitchen to get an ingredient, says Head of Animation Kira Lehtomaki. "We wanted that rhythm to be in the bones of these characters."

In order to make sure it was done authentically, Jamal Sims was brought in. A prolific live-action choreographer with animation credits also under his belt, he and a key member of his team, Kai Martinez, a dancer of Colombian descent who would serve as the film's long-term reference consultant, were introduced to initial storyboards and layout. "We hadn't done a whole lot of animation by that point," says Lehtomaki, "so we got to explain who these characters were [and the choreographers] could start designing the dances that felt appropriate for each of them."

This gave the choreographers "a lot of context for us to dive into [the Madrigal] world," says Martinez, and helped them use dance to make the most of the body shapes that the artists had designed. One example is Luisa, the middle Madrigal sister, whose magical ability is super strength. "Luisa leans heavily on reggaeton dance moves because she has great mass that we can really throw around and show the effect of the power of that," says Woodside, referring to a mix of several genres, including reggae, hip hop, and other Caribbean and Latin American influences. Mirabel, on the other hand, is prone to mistakes, making salsa cali (a kind of double-time salsa) a perfect tool to play with her awkward nature.

> "We got to fine-tune each character and their movement. Really find the particularities of their footfalls or weight transfers." —Kai Martinez

GAME ON

Before the animators could get deep into their work, though, they needed choreography references. Armed with their introduction to the story and characters, Sims and his team had to bring a great deal of imagination to the big, empty studio space where they began to map out the sequences. According to Martinez, there was plenty of creative improvising, as when some of the dancers moved shoe boxes in and out to the beat of the music to simulate drawers opening and closing.

The rough draft choreography references were given to production, accompanied by Martinez who served as a guide. At first she was hesitant about what the animators could accomplish. Woodside recalls talking to her early on, and her surprise when she realized that the characters weren't going to be too cartoony. "I was like, oh, you guys can really do this," Martinez says. "I knew it was game on."

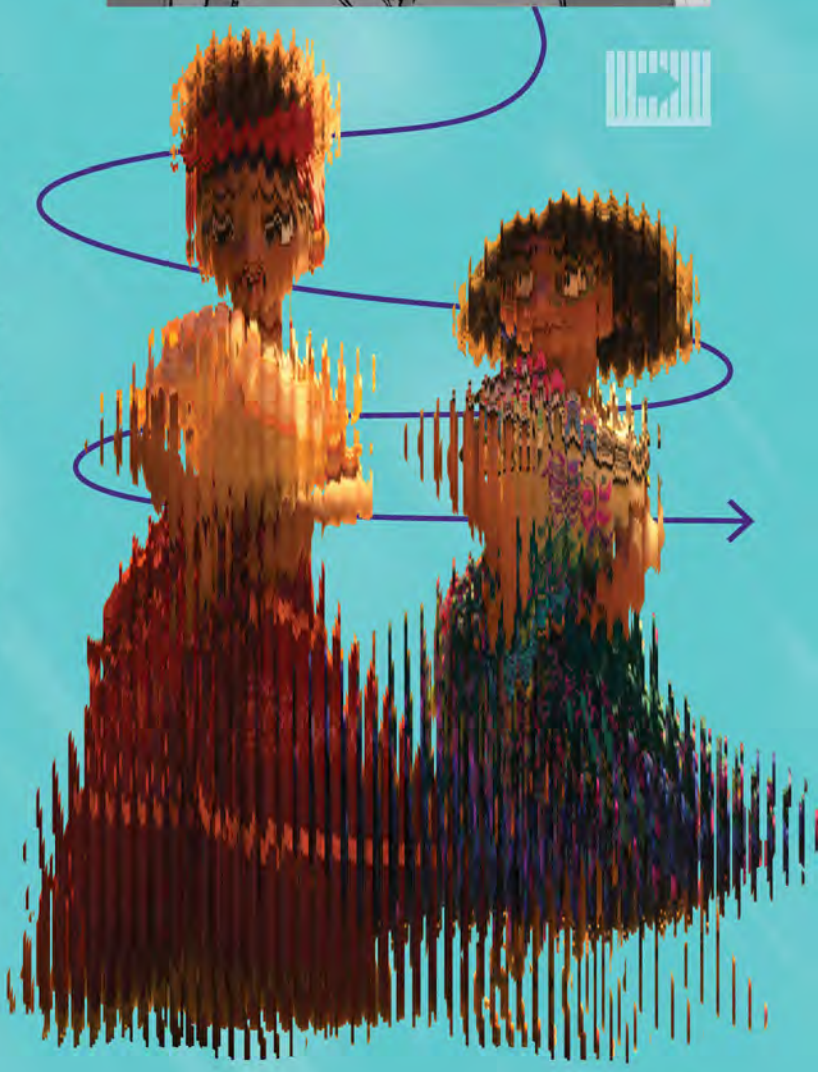
One of the exciting discoveries Martinez made during production was that dancers and animators speak the same language: "We are obsessed with how things move and where they initiate from." She remembers one of the first animated sequences she viewed and how the film's other Head of Animation Renato dos Anjos pointed out that [eldest sister] Isabela's hip was a little too turned out: "I was like, wow, you saw that too!"

This was the first time Lehtomaki and dos Anjos had worked so closely, so early on, and for such a long period of time with a choreographer over the course of a film—an opportunity they appreciated since Martinez "really understood the characters and understood their drive," says dos Anjos. Martinez, in turn, loved working with the animators after the dancers had finished a reference because "we got to fine-tune each character and their movement. Really find the particularities of their footfalls or weight transfers." At times, says Woodside, what this meant was the animators showing her their work via video and "she would just stand in her living room and dance it out."

GOING IN CIRCLES

Encanto's collaborative process was not linear, with much of the back and forth relying on which stages the songs were in. "Until a song gets written, I don't think we know the full scope of what even the character needs to do in that moment," says Director Byron Howard. "So there was this great sort of circular workshopping of the characters and the story" with Lin-Manuel Miranda, who wrote the film's eight original songs, the heads of animation, and the story team, being boarded and reboarded along the way.

A similar approach was used in Netflix's *Vivo*, a musical about a kinkajou (rainforest honey bear) whose deep partnership with an elderly street musician named Andrés sends him on a mission from Havana to Miami, picking up Gabi, a free-spirited tween, along the way. According to Story Artist Carlos Romero, the directors, layout artists, story artists, and writers would gather in a room and discuss their vision for how a song should feel. Then, says Co-Director Brandon Jeffords, the team had to be willing to jump around, from the songwriter (Miranda, who also wrote the original songs for *Vivo*) to the choreographer to various other departments—"then back into storyboarding again, and then over to layout again ... it becomes this cyclical process until you find something that's working."



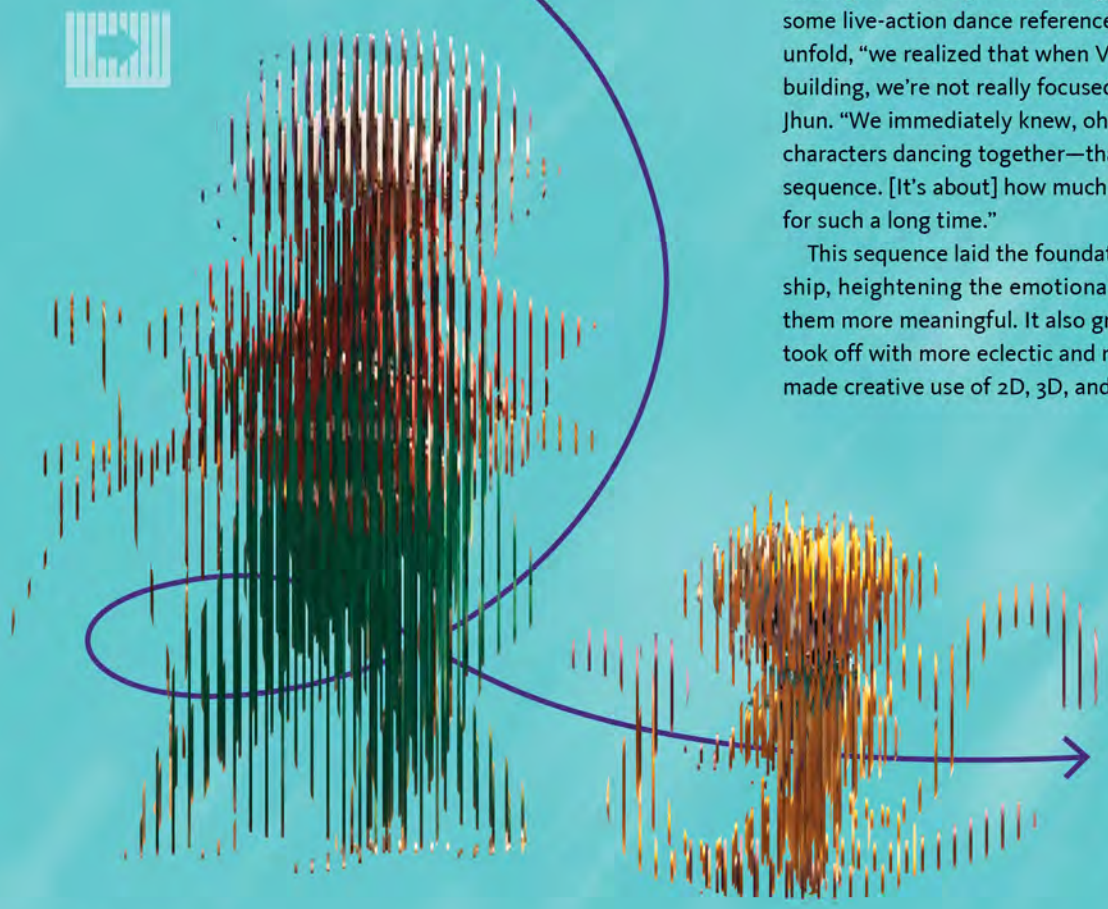
THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: Kai Martinez (right) and a fellow dancer created references for sisters Mirabel and Isabela for *Encanto*'s "We Don't Talk About Bruno" sequence. The sisters' dance moves can be captured using the enclosed interactive transparent overlay. **OPPOSITE:** Visual development images explored *Encanto*'s Mirabel in motion.

Also important in this process was the development of the characters—something that the choreographers influenced at various points. Lehtomaki says that the first time the *Encanto* character of Dolores was tackled in a significant way was early on while developing the song sequence for "We Don't Talk About Bruno." Dolores is the family gossip with the magical power of super hearing, and "Kai thought, well, if she can hear everything, she's going to want to be very quick and quiet about all of her movements, and so she likened her to moving like a cat."

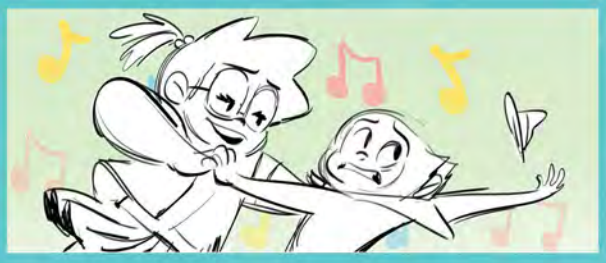
The team took this as a source of inspiration going forward so that whenever Dolores appears, she pops up where you least expect her. The balls of her feet touch the ground first, rather than in the usual heel-toe manner, because she's purposefully trying to be quiet. Having the cat verbiage for Dolores was great, Woodside says, because "as we're looking at her on-screen, [we ask ourselves,] does she feel like a cat? If she doesn't, then we can talk about why. This was a place where choreography definitely drove animation."

Choreography also played a role in helping to shape the mood that sets up *Vivo*. For the opening musical sequence, "One of a Kind," many different approaches were explored. "Vivo was jumping from this building to that building," sliding down laundry lines and jumping into a soccer game, says Head of Cinematography Layout Yong Duk Jhun. But when the filmmaking team brought in choreographer Calvit Hodge to provide some live-action dance references for how the scene could unfold, "we realized that when Vivo's jumping from building to building, we're not really focused on Vivo and Andrés," says Jhun. "We immediately knew, oh my God, that's it! Those two characters dancing together—that's the whole point of the sequence. [It's about] how much they've been doing together for such a long time."

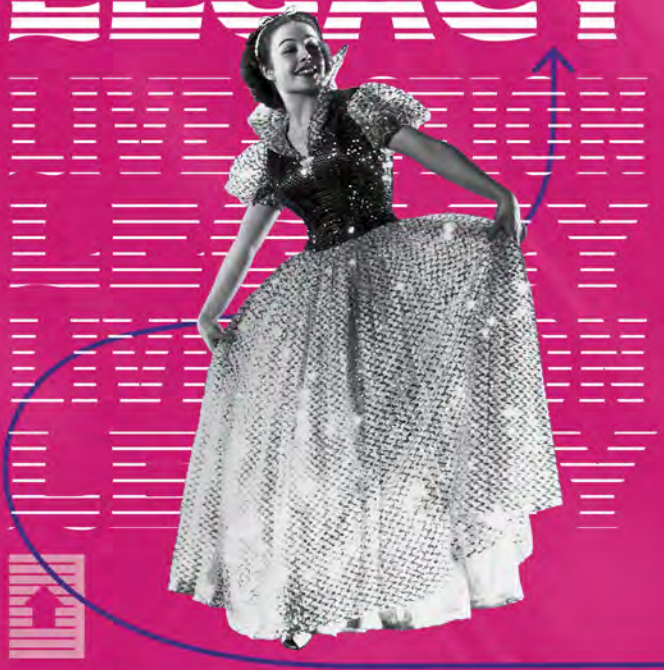
This sequence laid the foundation for the characters' friendship, heightening the emotional scenes to come and making them more meaningful. It also grounded the movie before it took off with more eclectic and raucous musical sequences that made creative use of 2D, 3D, and 2D/3D hybrids.



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: Choreographer Calvit Hodge led his dance team in moves that would help shape the opening musical sequence of *Vivo*. Using the enclosed transparent overlay, the picket-fence animation technique brings Andrés and Vivo to life. **OPPOSITE:** Carlos Romero's storyboards set up the dynamic between energetic Gabi and wary Vivo in *Vivo*'s "My Own Drum" sequence.



LIVE-ACTION LEGACY



In the early days of animation, artists kept mirrors at their desks so they could observe their own facial expressions. Then, as studios started moving into theatrical features, there was a push to step things up. "How do we make the audience not just look at the technique but actually engage with the characters?" says Fox Carney, Manager of Research at Disney Animation Research.

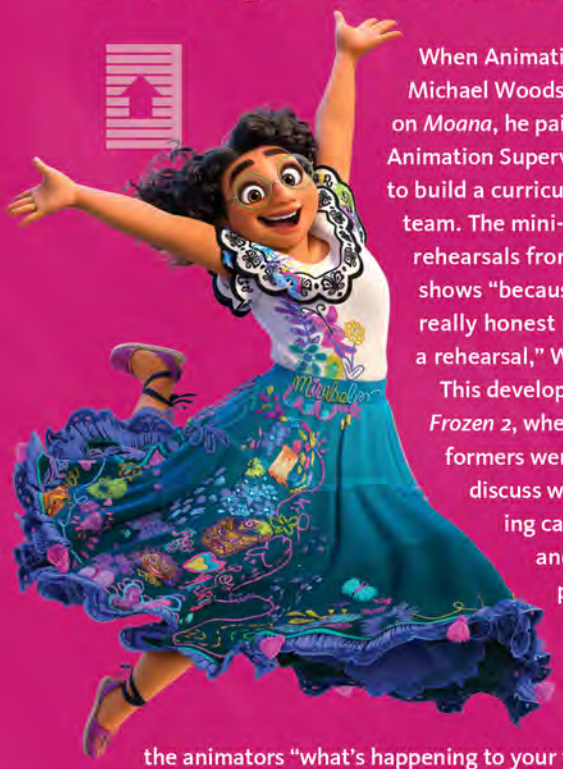
Pivotal to this was *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, where a young dancer named Marge Champion donned a Snow White costume (above) and danced while being filmed. Then her various poses were traced from printed frames to be used as starting points. As time passed, though, these interim tracings became too much effort, especially since animators weren't going for accuracy but rather believability by capturing the spirit of a pose or the timing of a movement.

In this way, the swoosh of actress Helene Stanley's skirt influenced the gracefulness of Aurora in *Sleeping Beauty*; Louis Prima's big band set the festive mood for "I Wanna Be Like You" in *The Jungle Book*; and actress Sherri Stoner's dancing in front of a grid helped shape the liquid movements of Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*.

These days there are rooms where animators can film themselves without having to set up a stage with lights, camera people, and models. "They can say, okay, I'm going to jump, I'm going to run, I'm going to collapse," explains Carney, "and so you've got the spontaneous ability of the artist to capture themselves, which is almost like back to the days of the original mirror."

Technology can do a lot, Carney says, but it can't replace the intuitive nature of a human in motion, not to mention the kind of impromptu gestures—the sudden flick of a wrist, the unanticipated tilt of a head—that bring beloved animation characters to life.

TAKE A BREATHER



When Animation Supervisor Michael Woodside was working on *Moana*, he paired with fellow Animation Supervisor Justin Sklar to build a curriculum for their team. The mini-classes looked at rehearsals from Broadway shows "because you can get a really honest performance in a rehearsal," Woodside says. This developed further on *Frozen 2*, when Broadway performers were brought in to discuss where their breathing came from in a song, and on *Encanto*, performers and professional singers united with vocal coaches to teach the animators "what's happening to your tongue inside your mouth when you're making a sound," says Head of Animation Kira Lehtomaki. "When you're making a vibrato, what's happening in your throat? Do you see the tendons in your neck strain?"

For Isabela, the perfect sister, the animators had to learn how someone who sings with technical perfection breathes, and then with Mirabel, they had to figure out how to ignore those rules. "One of the very first things the directors told us is that Mirabel cannot be a professional singer," says Head of Animation Renato dos Anjos. "And for us it's a little bit like, oh my God, we've been learning these things for years, and now you're telling us we cannot use them. But I think that was a very successful approach to make it so that Mirabel felt relatable to anybody."

According to Fox Carney, Manager of Research at Disney Animation Research, understanding singing and breathing isn't just about getting techniques right. Animators also sit in on recording sessions "looking for attitude." He cites the example of Jodi Benson singing *The Little Mermaid's* "Part of Your World." "There's a certain sincerity," says Carney, "a sense of longing when you see the live-action footage of the recording session. And of course the animator thinks, oh, I have to capture that."

TO DANCE OR NOT TO DANCE

Another task before developing dance sequences is to answer the question posed by Howard: "How much of a musical is it if you're going to use music? Is it a film with songs? From the get-go, all of us wanted *Encanto* to be a capital M musical."

Next comes deciding where to put the sequences, something that isn't always a pre-planned choice. "At some point the movie, the feel of it, the vibe of it, the structure of it says, this is a good place for music, or this is a character worthy of singing a song," says Director/Co-Writer Jared Bush. "As we were going through the script," Castro Smith adds, "Jared and I would say, okay, we think this is a song moment and kind of talk to Lin about it and see what he thought and trade ideas and thoughts about what the character was thinking and what we needed out of the moment. It was pretty organic."

Once a song finds its place, explains Romero of his work on *Vivo*, "It was important to get visuals and storytelling that kept the flow and the timing of the song as a priority to help the song feel as connected as possible—you're trying to connect where the non-musical parts of the film have taken us so far, and fusing that with where the song is going to take us."

RIGHT ANGLES

Filming choreography is about more than just capturing movements like the turn of a hip or the swish of a skirt. It's also about capturing angles. Woodside felt fortunate, with production during Covid, that he was allowed to attend *Encanto's* choreography sessions to film different viewpoints. This way, if the directors told the animators, "you're going to animate Mirabel walking through a crowd," Woodside was able to share reference choreography from various angles that had been shot for that specific sequence. The directors then chose the angles they felt worked best, and this gave the animators the confidence to know that if they used those references, they were working in the right direction.

This photography also helped the cinematographers frame the musical sequences. "All dance choreography isn't designed to shoot at 360 degrees," says *Vivo's* Jhun. "A lot of dance choreography [should be shot] from certain angles. For example, when the dancers are moving back and forth and left to right, if you shoot from the side, it's not going to work. You have to shoot from the front."

Jhun appreciated that Hodge's team helped guide him as he shot the choreography sessions "because there's an intention of how they want to dance to show it to the audience," he says. "It was a bit of collaboration between Calvit and his dancers and me and my camera

crew to come up with [how to film] the song 'My Own Drum.' It was super fun."

Despite all of the efforts to achieve authenticity—from precise body movements to carefully crafted camera angles—reality is not the goal. Instead, the hoped-for result is the perception of reality as it relates to the character, according to dos Anjos. When he was watching choreographers interpret a song, he says it was tempting to just copy and paste, "but the magic of animation is picking and choosing everyone's best elements and infusing it into the scene for the story and characters."

"What an animator does is take liberties," says *Vivo's* Jeffords, while *Encanto's* Lehtomaki adds, "we're always going for believable over realistic." Easier said than done? Definitely. As dos Anjos notes, dance in animation always involves more than just specific moves. It also has to incorporate everything from the rhythm on the music track to the character's acting in the scene. Because of this, he says, "it's one of the most challenging things an animator can do."

"...the magic of animation is picking and choosing everyone's best elements and infusing it into the scene for the story and characters." —Renato dos Anjos

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: In *Encanto*, the Madrigal's magical house had a life of its own. It was not enchanted, though, says Lehtomaki. Rather, "anything that was physically attached to the walls or floors of the house, the house could move like limbs. But if there was a chair sitting on the dining room floor, the chair couldn't move on its own. The house would have to move the tiles underneath to move the chair." **OPPOSITE:** Like all of the characters in *Encanto*, Mirabel's personality is reflected in the way she dances.

THE ART OF DELEGATION

BY EVAN HENERSON

The task is at hand—a series or movie—and as the person in charge, you are the one who has to make sure things are operating like the proverbial well-oiled machine. To accomplish this, you will need to hand off large portions of work to various team members. In short, delegate, a task that can be as challenging as it is necessary. But as supervisors within the field of animation and experts in management will tell you, the art of delegation can be mastered if you have the right tools.

THE EXPERTS

Monica Davila
Supervising Producer, unannounced series at Atomic Cartoons

Hassan Osman*
Project Management Office Director at Cisco Systems and author of *Effective Delegation of Authority*

M. Scott McKee
VFX Supervisor at DWTV

Josh Upton
Development Partner: Talent Manager & Career Coach

Stephen Neary
Creator/Executive Producer of *The Fungies!*

Carol Walker
Founder and Owner of Prepared to Lead

BE OPEN

With apologies to Billy Shakespeare (who not only wrote a few plays, he also helped *run* a theater company), some are born managers. Some achieve manager-ium, and some have management thrust upon them. Many people who end up running shows or supervising departments start their careers as artists and move up through the ranks. Some are groomed to be supervisors. Others are tapped perhaps before they express interest or even before they're necessarily ready to lead.

As for the best managers, they are the people who want to be managers, according to Upton. "It sounds simple and straightforward, but not everyone wants [this]. People typically start a career because they love the craft," but the further they go, they might find themselves forced into a management position. "Sometimes that's fine," Upton says, "because you may be inclined and interested in developing those skills." But it's important that this inclination and interest is genuine.

With all of your attention on the endpoint, it's hard not to think of every step as "my work," and the idea of someone else doing "my work" can be stressful. So you end up doing—or micromanaging—everything yourself.

Leadership, particularly within a creative industry like animation, also takes a special mindset—an openness to, well, being open to others.

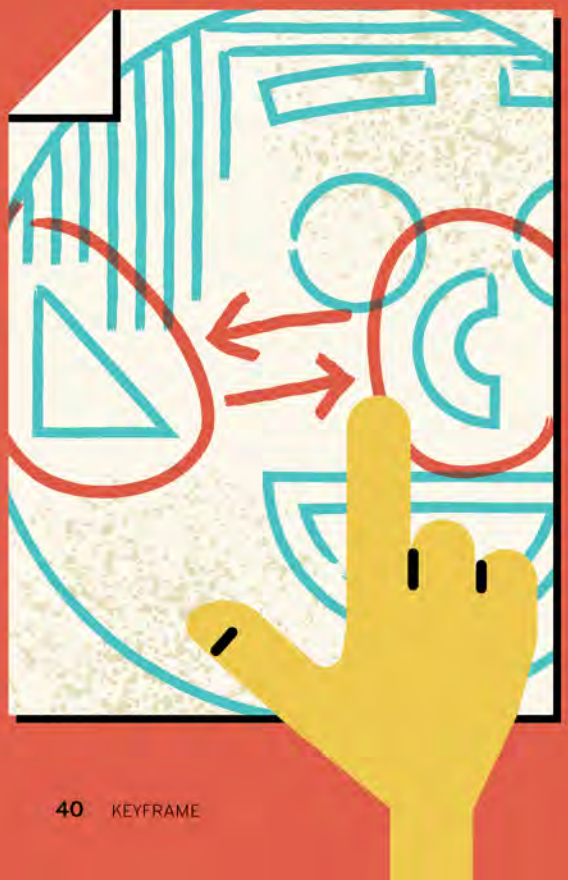
"One of my guiding principles is [to] embrace humanity," says Upton. "No matter what process you use or what delegation techniques you apply, the people on the receiving end are the trump cards. So I think it's important to come from an understanding that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to everything you do as a leader. It's a bit about being humble."

ENJOY THE RIDE

Certainly, there are deadlines and deliverables that come with any project. But as any Type A creative will tell you, when you focus too much on plowing through the work just to get it done, that's when the quality suffers. The same goes for management, says Walker, who maintains that supervisors who delegate with a "get-it-done mindset" can miss the bigger picture.

"It sets you up for a really bad frame of mind," she explains. With all of your attention on the endpoint, it's hard not to think of every step as "my work," and the idea of someone else doing "my work" can be stressful. So you end up doing—or micromanaging—everything yourself.

A more productive way of thinking is to view the project as a system. As the manager, how do you make your system



QUESTION & CALIBRATE

As a manager, you want to make sure your instructions are understood so the job gets done correctly. You also want to check in along the way. Our experts have a few tips for how to communicate from start to finish.

- Once you've assigned a task—and before the person gets to work—ask if everything you said makes sense. Ask if anything needs to be repeated.
- Don't check in randomly. Set clear timelines and schedule checkpoints so the person is prepared. These checkpoints should be quick, reviewing what has been accomplished so far, allowing for clarifying questions, and making course corrections if necessary.
- Once the work has been completed, if it's not as expected, follow up with constructive questions with an eye toward encouragement, collaboration, and improvement. Let the person know that their work is valued, and invite them to both help solve the problem and contribute suggestions for how to avoid the same mistakes going forward.

"The best supervisors are those who lead with empathy and treat employee mistakes as learning experiences," Osman says. "This helps them solve challenges with their employees instead of for them."

as robust as possible? What resources do you have? How can you deploy those resources to make things work effectively? In this way, "my work" becomes "our work" and the outcome is a natural result of the process.

CHOOSE WISELY

In a perfect world, you are given full control over each of the departments you oversee. You are also given ample time to hand-pick every team member, each of whom is someone you have worked with multiple times before. You know their style; they know yours; you speak an unspoken language, and the work distribution flows naturally.

In the real world, the above-detailed scenario doesn't often happen. You probably have some creative control over who is in your department, but you will inherit team members who have been selected by producers or other higher ups. In addition, crews shift from movie to movie, and series staff can change from season to season as members move on to other shows and new people need to be brought in. All of this is common. But when you're dealing with people whose work you don't know, there may be an adjustment period of figuring out who does what and to what extent.

Davila looks for people with strong time-management skills who don't have problems hitting deadlines. She also looks for those who seem especially skilled at managing their own departments. One example is Katya Bowser, a storyboard director on one of Davila's current shows (not to mention TAG Shop Steward at Atomic Cartoons).

"Katya had never directed before, but I had seen how well she listened and worked with artists on other shows," says Davila. "Her strong board skills definitely gave her an edge when we were looking at all our directing candidates, but it was her ability to lead, rather than micromanage or talk down to people, that really put her at the top of our list. It seemed like a little thing at the time to work well with others, but seeing how she's stepped up into leadership positions in the Union and how well she works with greener artists really sealed the deal. She's been an incredible asset to our show."

The result: Davila doesn't get bogged down in just one department and has more time to work with all the departments on her show.

OFFER OPPORTUNITIES

In a creative industry, it's not just about who is—on the surface—best able to do the work. You may have multiple people with varying skills and talents who could be plugged into different situations if the need arises. Delegating is about empowering your team as much as it is about getting the work done. When you give someone a chance to spread their wings, it can produce great results.

Within his team, McKee seeks out people with diverse skills sets, both artistically and technically, and people who are fun and will be able to keep things light. He also looks for people whose work has shown promise, but who may not have received the recognition they deserved ... until now.

"I'm always looking to give people opportunities," he says. "It's incredibly important. In addition to having the senior

TALK IT OUT

The more people you supervise, the more different personalities and abilities you will be dealing with. To bring these ingredients together harmoniously, the experts emphasize the value of one-on-one conversations.

- Ask the person what they look for in a manager. "What has made for a successful manager relationship in the past, and what conditions allow them to show their best selves at work, can set the groundwork for a strong relationship down the line," says Upton.
- "Having transparent discussions about their likes and dislikes, and providing a safe environment for them to speak up is key," says Osman. "After gaining that understanding, the next step is to manage through empathy. In other words, to adapt your delegation style based on the preferences and motivation factors of your team members."

HAVE FUN

"There are always these huge problems that you don't know how to solve," says McKee. "But there's [also] always someone on your team who thinks in a different way—someone who you least expect is going to find a way around that problem. It happens every time." So how do you make sure these people come forward? McKee offers these tips:

- Foster a safe place where everyone's ideas are valued and important—acknowledge contributions.
- Work together, throw out ideas, and give people the chance to experiment to make something right.
- Take time to identify challenges and gather the right combination of people to solve them.
- Listen to a person's needs and then make sure they have what they need to accomplish a task.
- Define strengths and then adjust to weaknesses using your team as a whole.
- Always remember how much fun your job is—you're in animation. How cool is that!

people you depend on, I'm also looking for new artists who show promise. As you're doing that, you're fulfilling their needs because they're growing and they're also getting these opportunities to shine."

"The deepest job satisfaction tends to come from having our existing talents recognized, utilized, and valued," Walker says. "People enjoy doing what they are good at."

HOLD ON AND LET GO

With your team in place, it should be easy to just let the various departments do their jobs while you make sure everything is on track. But suppose you came from the creative side of animation, and suppose you still love doing the tasks that you now oversee?

That's okay, as long as you recognize your limits. There will be a certain necessary amount of letting go, of realizing that you no longer have the time to step in and take over a task that now falls to a department that you supervise. But there's no rule that you are required to delegate absolutely everything.

Neary, who took great delight in storyboarding throughout his career, heeded the advice of *Steven Universe* creator, Rebecca Sugar, who counseled that a showrunner still needed to draw on their own show as a kind of treat. "You have to reward yourself for your own satisfaction," Neary says. "Once you realize that, you can assign yourself some shots and not worry about having to do every single thing."

Of course, there will be times when circumstances demand that you give the responsibility to someone else. Neary recalls a recording session for an episode of *The Fungies!* that would feature the voice of Stephin Merritt of the band The Magnetic Fields. A huge fan, Neary wanted to be present for the session himself. One slight hitch: his partner was going into labor for the birth of their first son.

With his time limited, "I needed to hand this off to my director, Katie Aldworth," says Neary. "She's amazing and a super-talented artist who has been in so many sessions. The problem wasn't her covering for me. The problem was me letting go and realizing, 'Hey, you've got other stuff to do right now. You're pretty busy, and that's okay.'"

CLARIFY BEFORE YOU CLARIFY

Communication is a critical factor of management and delegation—giving your team members a clear and consistent idea of what is expected of them, and letting them know that you are there to answer questions or address problems as they arise.

Admittedly, the COVID landscape that drove many to work remotely has created additional hurdles to keeping everyone on track. But the basic principles apply across the board, starting with this one: Task-setting or delegating meetings should be held early, but not so early that you're not yet firmly clear about what you want or expect.

"This may sound obvious, but many leaders make the mistake of starting a delegation discussion with their employees while they're still in brainstorming mode," says Osman. "This problem is further exacerbated when coupled with the fact that employees usually won't question their manager's request because they want to avoid being perceived as incompetent. An invitation to discussion from a manager may instead be interpreted as a hard directive, leaving subordinates to try and execute ambiguous tasks. These factors can lead to situations where employees are confused about delegation expectations, which can result in failure."

EVALUATE AND TEACH

The work has come in, and it's close, but not there yet. The more hands-on person might be tempted to step in and quickly finish up the job. That's how Davila was inclined to proceed as a storyboard director. But as a supervising producer, she realized that the process wasn't working.

Back when she was the storyboard director, she could open up the storyboard file and mark the poses she wanted or give the revision notes and say, "Here you go. I wrote down which shots need what. Get to work on this, give it back to me, and I'll review it and send it on to the editor."

Now that she's supervising, she attends meetings with executives to discuss music, casting, and other aspects of the show. She no longer has the time between reviewing and sending work to the editor to make final corrections herself. "I found that the more I did [this], the more I was stretching myself too thin," she says. "And I wasn't really letting [my staff] learn. I had to back off."

SET YOURSELF FREE

A good manager knows their strengths and weaknesses as well as the strengths and weaknesses of their team. One of the benefits of becoming a supervisor is the ability to delegate things that are less in your wheelhouse to team members who A) might be grateful for the assignment and B) might therefore do it more skillfully than you would.

There's no shame in giving a task away. It can be one of the best ways to set up an effective system, according to Walker. "To me there is nothing more powerful than saying to a second-in-command, 'Look, you are fantastic at this. It doesn't come as naturally to me. Would you be interested in taking over this aspect?' This is incredibly empowering," she says. "Don't be afraid to delegate stuff just because your brain doesn't work as well in that area. That's strength, not weakness."

Osman's views are his own and not those of Cisco Systems.

HOLIDAY SPIRIT

If there's anything this past year has shown us, it's that the support of our families and friends is crucial. With the holidays coming, we can thank those people with special gifts and support local artists and our Union kin. The fourth annual Holiday Gift Guide continues to showcase crafts and artwork by some of The Animation Guild's talented members. You can find this year's market at *Keyframe* online. Here we spotlight some of the vendors who will be sharing their creative work.

"Setting Sun"
Cutting Board
Padauk and cherry woods
15.75" long x 9.75" wide
x .8125" thick
$90

HEIRLOOM ARTISTRY
Drew Newman

A 2D animator for nearly 15 years, and currently working on *Bob's Burgers*, Drew Newman found his love of digital art waning over time and "yearned to feel creative again, working with physical materials like I used to do as a child," he says.

Woodworking fulfilled that desire, and Newman approaches it with the same attitude he brings to his animation: "To invest my time toward making something I'm proud of." Rather than pursuing a formal education, he says that he received his "woodworking degree" from YouTube, teaching himself everything from best table saws to properly applying Danish oil to walnut wood. "I am always eager to make mistakes early on when learning something new by diving in and making something asap," he explains. "If it goes wrong, I get to problem solve how to salvage the project or come up with a different item to make with the surviving material."

Newman has a workshop set up on his second-floor balcony, which means he keeps his projects small and manageable. He loves working with exotic woods like the strikingly streaked Ambrosia maple and vivid Padauk, and he enjoys playing with hue and value combinations to create high-contrast pieces that grab attention. The goal of all this? To make items, he says, that look expensive and can outlive their owners and serve as heirlooms.

Instagram.com/drawnewman
drewhah@gmail.com

"Cherry Canary" Sushi Tray Set
Cherry, canary, walnut, and Ambrosia maple woods.
Comes with a pair of chopsticks, chopsticks rest, and sauce dish.
10.5" long x 5.5" wide x 2.25" tall
$400

IN THE SHADOWS

Jeanne Erickson

As a child, Jeanne Erickson always wanted her silhouette done by one of the artists on Main Street at Disneyland. That never happened, but years later, when she had her own daughters, she thought it would be fun to draw their silhouettes along with those of other relatives for gifts. "I enjoyed making them, and they were such a big hit that I thought I'd try selling them," she says. "That's when I opened my Etsy shop Royal Paperie.

A character layout artist who started as an intern, Erickson has been on *The Simpsons* for 19 years. While it might seem that Bart doesn't have much in common with the historic art of silhouette-making, Erickson says, "I've learned in animation how important a good silhouette is when telling a story. You want your drawing to have a clear silhouette of the action and mood you're trying to show. I love how they relate to each other so well [and] how a silhouette can show so much character even though it's just an outline. It's really made me appreciate silhouettes more as I see them in antique stores and in animation."

Erickson draws digital custom silhouettes of children, adults, and pets. She also likes to draw silhouettes of actors and characters from popular books and movies, and "I've done silhouettes of customers' loved ones who have passed away," she says. "I love that I can be a part of making a special memory." She emails her customers JPG and PDF files that they can print out, and she's seen her silhouettes used for gifts, logos, craft projects, social media, and even tattoos, which she thinks is "so cool."

Etsy.com/shop/RoyalPaperie
instagram.com/royalpaperie

***Labyrinth*: Jareth & Sarah silhouette (JPG file): $6**

Custom Pet Portrait: $25

Custom Child's Silhouette Portrait with polka-dot background: $28

BEAUTIFUL UNCERTAINTY
Rachel Verity

Feeling burnt out from working all day, Rachel Verity started taking ceramics classes as a way to reconnect to art. "I love the tactile nature of clay," she says. "There are so many different techniques in ceramics, and the endless options for what you can make really interested me."

Verity started in animation about five years ago as a color designer and now works as a background painter at Bento Box. She intentionally keeps her ceramics and animation work separate. "I don't look at [ceramics] as something I have to get better at, but rather something I want to enjoy and feel the freedom to fail and not have to learn anything from it," she explains. "Of course, you do get better with time, but it's not my goal when making pieces."

These days, Verity makes high fire, wheel thrown ceramics. She says that she mainly uses porcelain "which can be a temperamental clay body but shows color beautifully. Ceramics can be unpredictable, though, and I find a lot of joy in that because you never know how anything will turn out. Sometimes it's way better than you could've hoped, and sometimes it's garbage—and both are okay!" While the ceramics Verity sells are mainly functional, such as retro rainbow cups, illustrated bowls and plates, or floral-inspired planters, she occasionally creates decorative pieces for display.

Etsy.com/shop/SunfieldPots
Instagram.com/sunfieldpots

Floral Planter
Hand-painted porcelain planter with drainage hole
4" tall x 6" diameter
$100

Floral Coffee Drip Set
Stoneware coffee drip and draining dish; fits a #2 coffee drip filter
Drip: 3.25" tall x 4.375" wide
Dish: 1.25" tall x 3.75" wide
$75

Studded Vase
Hand-painted porcelain vase (seconds)
2.5" interior diameter x 5" tall
$60

REDEFINING FEMININITY

Lisa Kim

In her early twenties, Lisa Kim enjoyed making Christmas baskets for family and friends. One year she wire-wrapped Swarovski crystal snowflakes on a basket's handle to give to a friend who worked in accessory design. Her friend's response: "You should make jewelry!" As enticing as that thought was, Kim was focused on her animation career. She had studied at NYU Tisch School of the Arts and was working her way up the ladder. Ten years ago, though, she finally decided to explore jewelry manufacturing. "I took a wax carving class and fell in love with it," she says.

"I make relatively large statement pieces," she explains. "Jewelry requires precious finite materials. If you are going to invest in a piece, I think it should be something that you absolutely love and that makes other people stop in their tracks to say, 'Holy cow! What is that??' And then you have a conversation about it ... Life is too short for boring jewelry." Kim also sets out to offer an alternate view of femininity. "Teeth, claws, and wings are adaptations that allow powerful animals to survive and thrive," she says. "These forms are a natural choice for jewelry that expresses a woman's power."

Now a storyboard artist on *Velma*, Kim believes that "animation is storytelling, and this skill has helped me build a story into my jewelry collections." She has a great love for mythology and uses it to create a spiritual aspect to her jewelry based on The Hero's Journey.

Kim creates her jewelry with a combination of lost wax casting and metal fabrication, as well a technique used to create reliefs in sheet metal with hammer blows. Most of her designs can be produced in any metal, and she also does custom designs. "I really enjoy working with clients to create pieces they truly love," she says. "It's often a new experience for my clients, and when I look at it through their eyes, I always think of how lucky I am to be able to pursue my practice in this art form."

lisakimfinejewelry.com
info@lisakimfinejewelry.com
Instagram.com/lisakimfinejewelry

Jawbone Ear Climbers
Sterling silver **($140)**
Also available in 18k yellow gold **($1,170)**

Moonstone Studs
Black rhodium-plated sterling silver **($2,265)** with moonstones 12mm in diameter
Also available in 18k yellow, rose, and white gold **($3,584)**

Eye Ring
18k yellow gold with 0.35 ct diamonds and 1.45 cts moonstone **($5,375)**

This item is made to order and needs a 4-week lead time.

SUCCULENT SIDELINE

John Bailey Owen

After a friend suggested that John Bailey Owen watch *Adventure Time*, he knew he wanted to write for animation. Mission accomplished. Most recently, he spent four years as a staff writer (as well as story editor and co-producer) on *The Owl House*. He's also in the succulent business. But unlike those hobbyists jumping on the bandwagon of propagating plants from cuttings, he starts from seed.

It's a passion that dates back to high school when he attended the Philadelphia Flower Show. He thought he would see people battling it out over who had grown the craziest-looking flower. Instead, it was mostly themed displays. Still, he took a wander around, and that's when he discovered "some succulents that looked like exposed brains. Lithops! That's more what I was looking for," he says.

From then on, he started growing succulents, but it wasn't until he moved to Los Angeles that he went "insane with them." He says he grows succulents from seeds because "it gets you the most interesting plants. Someone sends you a tiny envelope, and soon you can have a specimen that grows on a single hill in Namibia. Nurseries can't provide that kind of variety, and most of their specimens have been propagated by division, which is just pulling apart one plant to make it into multiple plants. So they all look the same. But every seed can grow into an individual with its own traits."

Owen loves watching his plants change from "teeny tiny babies to big weirdos," but this means he ends up with more plants than even he wants. As a result, he started Good Pup Plants. All of the specimens he sells are grown from seed, have well-developed root systems, and are shipped bare-rooted with a side of special soil.

johnbaileyowen@gmail.com
Etsy.com/shop/GoodPupsPlants
Instagram.com/johnbaileyowen

Cylindrophyllum Calamiforme
"Blood-tipped finger-leaves and flowers that look like old mops," says Owen. "What's not to love? $20

Copiapoa Tenuissima Monstruosa
Owen describes this as "a nice soft little cactus with an unusual mutation." $15

A HAPPY BLUR

DIRECTOR VICKY JENSON FONDLY RECALLS WORKING ON *SHREK*, WINNER OF THE FIRST OSCAR FOR BEST ANIMATED FEATURE.

When *Shrek* came out 20 years ago, it was destined for animation history. In the spring of 2002, it won the first Oscar in the Academy Award's Best Animated Feature category. One of the film's two directors, Vicky Jenson, looks back on that win as a happy blur, in part, she says, because of the champagne, but mostly because this was not only her first win, but it was also her first time directing a feature film.

"The discoveries throughout the process—whether in story or in relationships with the amazing talent on the cast and crew—it filled me with a sense of wonder I only remember feeling as a kid," she says.

The story of an anti-social ogre might have seemed like a longshot for one of the most prestigious awards in entertainment, but Jenson says, "we tried—and ultimately succeeded—to do something more unique and complex than people realized. The story had meaning about love and belonging that ran deeper than its irreverent appearance. That wasn't typical at the time."

From directing a storyline with surprising profundity to watching voice actor Cameron Diaz (Princess Fiona) pull a drumstick from her shoulder bag to fuel just one more hour of recording, Jenson says, "it really was such an unpredictable and fantastic experience. I wouldn't trade it for the world."

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NEXT BEST PICTURE

"USES ANIMATION TO TELL A STORY IN A WAY LIVE-ACTION NEVER COULD."
THE WRAP

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ANIMATION IS FILM FESTIVAL
GRAND JURY PRIZE

WINNER
SUNDANCE DOCUMENTARY
WORLD CINEMA
GRAND JURY PRIZE

WINNER
ANNECY
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

FLEE

A FILM BY
JONAS POHER RASMUSSEN

NEON PARTICIPANT