

January 2024



Tropical Chill

TONY CLaar IS WINING FESTIVAL AWARDS IN EUROPE He says, "I just won another 1st place award for a film of mine. In Belgrade, an international fest awarded me "Best Super Short Film" for *Tropical Chill*. It was shown by the 51st Belgrade International Film Festival and online. It also won an Honorable Mention from Film Freeways' Art Film Awards. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNJcUmEomH4>



. Tony's film *No Sweat* won 1st place award for "Best Micro Short Film" earlier this year from the Mokkho International Film Festival in India. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7Veb88yG3I>

He also informs us that his short *Grin and Bear It* was shown in Zagreb on Dec. 11 in an event honoring Tomislav Simovic and his film scores. Apparently, the score was composed about 40 years ago when Tony was working at the Zagreb Animation Studio. He says, "How weird and wonderful! I was asked to record a video greeting for showing at the showing, so I did! They will show my film in Zagreb, Rijeka and Belgrade. I am so happy." (Tony studied animation at SF State, interned and then was hired by the Zagreb Studio.)



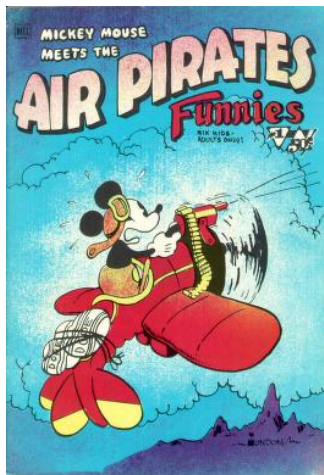
JUST AS THIS ISSUE WAS ABOUT TO BE SENT OUT, WE LEARNED TONY CLaar HAD DIED He was 74 and sounded fine when we spoke in early December. He was delighted with his recent successes at festivals in Europe, especially in an area he had once lived and worked. He has other shorts online. A long obit

was in the *SF Chronicle* and reprinted online <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/sfgate/name/tony-claar-obituary?id=53928897>



MICKY MOUSE IS FINALLY A PUBLIC DOMAIN CHARACTER! On January 1 the copyright expired on the original design of Mickey and Minnie (not on revised versions). Disney had guarded the rights to use anything that closely resembled Mickey for decades. Infringe on his rights and his staff would call out their lawyers. They went so far as busting a nursery school in the LA area years ago for copyright infringement because they had Disney cartoon characters painted on their wall. Hanna-Barbara got some positive press by telling the school they can use their characters.

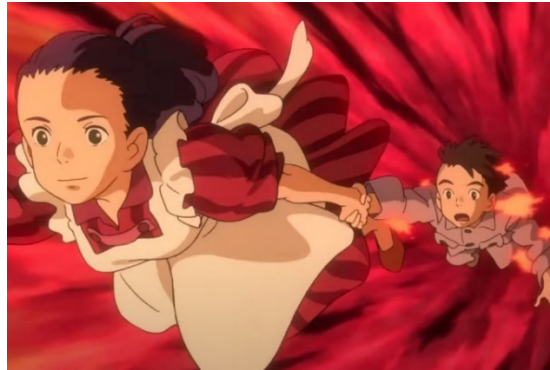
While Disney picking on a nursery school sounds like they over reacted, what about their suing the people behind the two underground comix books, *Air Pirate Funnies*, created by Dan O'Neill and the Air Pirates in 1971? The lawsuit was a long serious battle that ended in 1980. Basically, Dan was fighting for the right to use parody and he chose Disney as his opponent. Disney won their case against the group and everyone except Dan agreed to cease and desist.



Dan chose to continue to fight and published more controversial art based on Disney material. In 1980 the US Supreme Court refused to hear Dan's case. If you want details visit https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air_Pirates

I suspect lots of people and companies will now try to use Mickey in some way. Who will be the first to misuse Mickey's wholesome reputation? One candidate is a game company that will release a violent single player shooting marathon. The trailer for the "New Mickey Mouse FPS Game 2025" shows Mickey's gloved hand on a weapon and pulling the trigger. See the shocking, action packed trailer of a very bad Mickey in action https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpMVAEP6n7E&ab_channel=Punish

DISNEY CEL AUCTION TOPS \$3.3 MILLION In December a four-day auction of Disney art at Heritage in Dallas, Texas took in \$3.3 million. Earlier in 2023 Heritage's art by Disney took in a record \$4.8 million (they made a whopping \$8.1 million by selling old Disney animation art in 2023). No other auction house comes close to this level of success in this special category.



'BOY AND THE HERON' Hayao Miyazaki's *The Boy and the Heron* flew to a record-breaking \$12.8 million opening, making it the first original anime title in history to top the North American box office chart. The movie opened on a weekend when there were no new wide releases from the major Hollywood studios. The first and second weekends of December are generally slow before the release of the big Christmas films.

The film also broke Miyazaki's past record for a release in the U.S. His previous best was *The Wind Rises* earned \$5.2million in its entire North American run in 2013.

As for the reviews in the U.S. *Rotten Tomatoes* gave it 96% from the critics and it got an 89% from the public. The general summation of critic's comments is was, "Soulfully exploring thought-provoking themes through a beautifully animated lens, *The Boy and the Heron* is another Miyazaki masterpiece."

The summary of the audiences' comment was, "Boasting incredible animation and a satisfying story, *The Boy and the Heron* delivers more of the excellence that Hayao Miyazaki has trained audiences to expect."

I suspect that for a lot of people this is their first exposure to a serious animated film from Japan. This comment from an audience member may sum up a lot of what the public is thinking. The person said, "Definitely didn't dislike like it, but I have a hard time knowing how to feel about this one."

'THE BOY AND THE HERON' HAS AN ALL STAR VOICE CAST FOR THE ENGLISH

SOUNDTRACK Christian Bale - Shoichi Maki, Dave Bautista - The Parakeet King, Gemma Chan – Natsuko, Willem Dafoe - Noble Pelican, Karen Fukuhara - Lady Himi, Mark Hamill – Granduncle, Robert Pattinson - The Gray Heron, and Florence Pugh - Kiriko



'MIGRATION' The *Chronicle*'s reviewer enjoyed the film and said "packs plenty of laughs that'll easily win over the young kiddies and keep teens and adults engaged throughout..." The *Hollywood Reporter* simply called the film delightful and charming. *IndieWire* said, "An animated feature film mostly geared toward the

younger set, and if it delights them enough to inspire a deeper look into the *real* world of birds, that's good enough. Bonus: 82 minutes of family-friendly entertainment that should put the kids and adults in a good-enough mood during the madness of the holidays.” The film was directed by Benjamin Renner who was a co-director of *Ernest & Celestine* in 2012.



‘CHICKEN RUN: DAWN OF THE NUGGET’ Aardman’s long awaited sequel is getting nice reviews and an 80% rating from the critics (77% from the audience). It took six years to produce and the world premiere was at the London Film Festival in October. The *Hollywood Reporter* published a long interview with director Sam Fell. He told the paper, “The most impressive location in *Chicken Run: Dawn of the Nugget*, is arguably Chicken Village, the fowl-friendly island utopia where Ginger and her flock now reside after fleeing Mrs. Tweedy in the first film.” Fell also calls the land as a “Chicken Wakanda.” He said the set took two years to build. The 30-second opening shot showing the feathery residents doing their thing among the 22 houses arguably the most complicated in the company’s history — 4-5 weeks of prep time and then 18 weeks on the single shoot itself.”

Animation supervisor Ian Whitlock noted that one technological advance on this production over the first *Chicken Run* (2000) was keeping the fingers from falling off. They learned to use silicon to solve that problem. Also, on this production they were able to integrate CGI and stop-motion during the shoot. On the first feature they used wires to hold the birds in place in action shots and then paint them out. Now they used better constructed “gizmos” and paint it out digitally.

During the production the COVID-19 pandemic was in full swing so they had to adopt standard rules of safety about distance and being masked up on set of course, but also, since the puppets were handmade, they quarantined them before they could be used, sometimes for up to 10 days. The animators were also required to not lick the puppets they were working with, apparently a common tactic to touch them up during shoots. The pandemic pushed production back by about six months.

When fire destroyed a warehouse full of Aardman material in 2005 they lost much of their models and sets from the first *Chicken Run*. Thankfully, the head of animation was, according to Fell, a “hoarder” and several boxes of models were found in his attic. Nick Park still had a “bible” filled with his original sketches from 1998. What else was an important key resource in making the sequel was the making of book about the first feature.



'SOUL,' 'TURNING RED' AND 'LUCA' TO BE RELEASED TO THEATERS THIS YEAR *Soul*, *Luca* and *Turning Red* were mainly seen on Disney+ during Covid 19 years. Now Disney has announced that *Soul*, Pete Docter's Oscar-winning 2020 animated film about a middle-school band teacher who is transported to the "Great Before," will be released in cinemas on Jan. 12. *Turning Red*, Domee Shi's 2022 Oscar-nominated movie about a teen who turns into a red panda, debuts Feb. 9, and Enrico Casarosa's Oscar-nominated sea monster story *Luca* opens on March 22.

Luca will be paired with Pixar's classic short *For the Birds* (2000), which won an Oscar for best animated short. *Soul* will be preceded by Pixar's Oscar-nominated 2020 short *Burrow*; and *Turning Red*, will be shown with Academy-Award-nominated 2019 Short *Kitbull*.

Pixar's first post-pandemic theatrical release was *Lightyear* in 2022, followed by last spring's *Elemental*. The studio's next theatrical release will be *Inside Out 2*, the sequel to its 2015 Oscar-winning film about what goes on inside a child's head. It is scheduled to open in June. In the sequel, Riley is a teen confronted with new emotions.

Disney insiders say there were several reasons for the decision to give the three films a theatrical release, including a slowdown in family product next year because of the strikes. It also provides a prime opportunity to plug *Inside Out 2*.

WANT AN OFFICE AT PIXAR? THEY ARE SUBLEASING OFFICE SPACE In the wake of its first round of layoffs in a decade, Bay Area animation giant Pixar has listed 16,800 feet of newly renovated office space on the sublease market. The company rented an additional office building across the street from their 20-acre headquarters and spent \$3.6 million renovating 1201 Park Ave. in Emeryville this year. Space became available for subleasing in July when Disney decided they needed to cut their expenses by \$5.5 billion. Pixar let go 75 employees in June.



DISNEY LOST A BIG LAW SUIT, BUT THE DAMAGE WASN'T THE NINE-FIGURE AWARD BEING ASKED Disney infringed on a VFX company's intellectual property when it used copyrighted technology to animate CG characters in *Beauty and the Beast*, a jury has found. Siding in favor of Rearden, the jury awarded the firm roughly \$600,000 after finding that Disney knew it may be engaging in copyright

infringement by utilizing VFX software called MOVA Contour. It had already been used in array of titles by major studios across Hollywood, but Disney continued to use it and benefit from it after the issue of ownership was raised.

The problem was DD3, the company Disney teamed up with on the project, may not have owned the technology that the movie used. MOVA captures facial expressions and creates photorealistic computer graphic effects. In 2008 it was introduced in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. The photorealistic reverse-aging of Brad Pitt's face from an 87-year-old man was widely lauded as a VFX milestone, making Rearden's tech the talk of the town.

DISNEY IS BEING ATTACKED BY INVESTORS Ike Perlmutter, who sold Marvel to Disney and who is a backer of Trump, wants Nelson Peltz of Trian Partners to be added to the Disney board. Earlier in 2023 he laid out his concerns that Disney needs to cut costs. Perlmutter feels that Disney needs to bring back its dividend and get its free cash flow back on track. Disney was “over-earning” at its theme parks, gouging guests and not investing enough.

Disney's former CFO, Jay Rasulo, has joined Trian's proxy fight with the entertainment giant.



A BAD YEAR FOR BOB IGER (REPRINTED FROM HOLLYWOOD REPORTER) “Who wants to bet Bob Iger wishes he stayed retired? Disney got pummeled in 2023. The company's stock extended last year's doldrums and trades near its six-year low. Its Disney+ streaming service soared out of the gate in 2019, but has since hit growing pains. After having an extraordinary *seven* films cross the billion-dollar mark in 2019, the studio didn't have one this year (for the first time since 2014, pandemic years excluded). Disney's usual movie magic seemed to fizzle, from *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny* to *Haunted Mansion* to *Wish* to *The Marvels* (don't worry, the MCU earns its own “Lost” entry, below). Disney also managed to become a culture war target, and while it's tough to say how much of that is the company's fault, it doesn't help when your own *Snow White* star can't stop telling people how much she hates *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. The company's normally optically savvy CEO likewise stumbled, with Iger saying striking actors demands were “not realistic” as he was attending Allen & Co.'s billionaire summer camp and enjoying his \$27 million compensation package. (Come to think of it, Disney's *Star Wars* franchise isn't doing so hot either, but we don't want to pile on).”

BOB IGER RATIONALIZES MAKING SEQUELS At the Dealbook Summit in New York on Nov. 29, Disney CEO Bob Iger told the *NY Times* and others said, “I don't want to apologize for making sequels, there has to be an artistic reason to make them. We have made too many ... but we will only greenlight a sequel if we think the story that the creators want to tell is worth telling.”

He also commented on his retiring and having to return to his job. "I've tried hard to conduct my own postmortem, just so that we as a company don't do it again." He is focused on not repeating the same succession mistake he made last time. He added the board's current succession process "is robust right now," and he will "definitely" be stepping aside in 2026 when his contract is up.

DISNEY IS BEING SUED BY ABOUT 9000 WOMEN FOR "PAY EQUITY NIGHTMARE" IN DOCS

Disney is facing a class action suit involving nearly 9,000 women who allege discrimination against female workers, who say they're being paid less than their male counterparts. The case is believed to be one of the largest classes action suits over equal pay.

SOME OF THE ANIMATION WINNERS AND LOSERS OF 2023

Universal's *The Super Mario Bros.* became the second-biggest movie of the year, earning \$1.36 billion globally. (*Barbie* was number one with \$1.4 billion.) In 6th place, *Spider Man, Across the Spider Verse*, \$600.5million. In 9th place was *Elemental*, \$496 million. 24th place, *Paws Patrol*, \$197 million. 28th place, *Trolls Band Together*, \$185 million. 38th place, *Wish*, 128 million. 42nd place, *The Boy and the Heron*, \$116 million. 40th place, *Toy Story* re-release, \$27,5 million. 51th place, *Nightmare Before Christmas*, re-release, \$10.5 million. 67th place, *Asterix and Ubelix*, 45.5 million (not released in the UN). 160th place, *The Peasants*, \$9 million, (not really animated).



'MERRY LITTLE BATMAN'

Merry Little Batman is a fun introduction to the Caped Crusader for kids. It is serving as an unofficial pilot for *Bat-Family*, an upcoming animated series also on Prime. It runs 1 hour 32 minutes From Warner Bros,

The Hollywood Reporter said: "The film directed by Mike Roth is clearly a labor of love for all concerned, with enough Easter eggs and in-jokes to please even the most ardent Batman enthusiasts, including one referencing George Clooney's nipple-featuring Batsuit and Bruce and Damian happily scatting the *Batman* TV show theme. Geared very much to younger audiences, it's fast-paced to the point of freneticism. But it boasts an arresting visual style, its animation heavily indebted to the satirical drawings of Ronald Searle. Its wildly stylized representations of Wayne Manor, Gotham City and frequently grotesque villains are similar in their underground comic feel to such recent animated films as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem* (I got a particular kick out of the Joker wearing what looks like a zoot suit). The rocking musical score combining Christmas classics with originals by Patrick Stump adds further to the rambunctious energy."

"There's also plenty of the sort of sly humor pitched to adults, such as Batman, during a dark moment, reminding himself, "Remember what the therapist said about your brooding." Or a fed-up Joker announcing, "That does it! I'm moving to Metropolis!"



CARE TO GO ON A FASCINATING SURREAL ADVENTURE? Relax and clear your mind as you set off on an eight minutes trip in *La Diplomatie de L'éclipse*. It is described as “a lyrical, thoughtful, and impossibly resplendent short from five fifth-year animation students at Ecole MoPA in Arles, France.” (It is in English with French subtitles.) The diplomat from The World Council goes through a series of dream-like settings to get to negotiate with the Sun and Moon after learning humanity will vanish when the two align in a total eclipse. <https://www.stashmedia.tv/ecole-mopa-students-align-the-sun-and-moon-in-la-diplomatie-de-leclipse-short-film/>



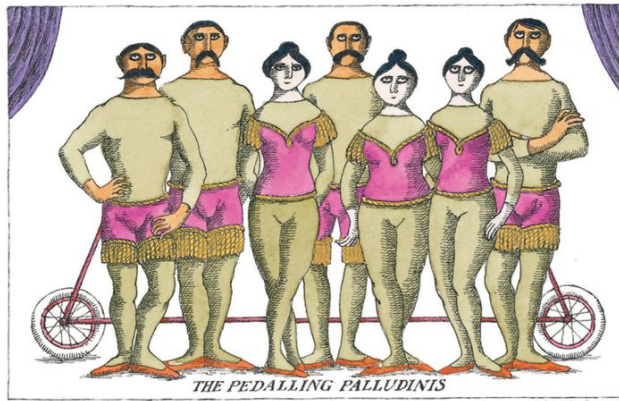
HAS THE “GREATIST” GODZILLA FEATURE JUST BEEN RELEASED? *Godzilla Minus One* was described in the *Hollywood Reporter* as being a combination of spectacular monster movie thrills and genuine emotion. Early in the film Koichi, a kamikaze pilot, makes the decision not to die for his country but rather to feign engine trouble and land on an island military base. Unfortunately, he chooses the moment that Godzilla arrives and lays waste to everyone there except Koichi and a mechanic. Soon Godzilla gets exposed to the U.S. military’s atomic test at Bikini Atoll and gains even greater strengths that make him even more indestructible. Then he attacks Tokyo. I think you can imagine what happens. See the action-packed trailer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvSrHIX5a-0>

The *Hollywood Reporter* review says the film was made on a “mere \$15 million. The scenes in which Godzilla goes on the rampage are superbly executed, making one think that the major Hollywood studios, which think nothing of spending ten times that amount for similar efforts, should immediately head to Japan and take some lessons.” (the trailer reminds me of 1950’s low budget sci-fi feature).

Wikipedia says the animation and visual effects were created by Shiroqumi at their studio in Chotu. They began creating the effects for *Godzilla Minus One* about April 2022 and completed them in January. The 3D animation software was Houdini and Maya with the compositing was done using Nuke.

While *The Boy and the Heron*, earned \$12.8 million, the best North American opening of his career, the same weekend, *Godzilla Minus One*, Toho Studios’ 37th film in the 70-year Godzilla franchise, climbed to

\$25.3 million in its second weekend, setting an all-time record for the most earned in North American theaters by a live-action Japanese film. The film had grossed \$72 million worldwide before Christmas and it was made for under \$15 million. It has received critical acclaim, so I suspect the film will go on to set more box office records.



EDWARD GOREY AND THE PERFORMING ARTS, NOW THROUGH MARCH 10 AT THE CARTOON ART MUSEUM IN SF

Cartoon Art Museum founder and Gorey enthusiast Malcolm Whyte presents an exhibit featuring Gorey's fanciful circus family known as The Pedalling Palludinis along with illustrations from the New York Metropolitan Opera's production *Turandot*; and the original poster artwork created for the Gorey-scripted and directed play *Lost Shoelaces*. Edward Gorey's masterful pen and ink illustrations and his ironic, offbeat humor have brought him critical acclaim and he has an avid following throughout the world.

ADJUNCT TEACHERS AT USC'S SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS SEEK TO FORM A UNION

USC is known as one of the best and most expensive film schools in the nation. It is also heavily endowed by Hollywood "royalty." Something is really strange if the employees are complaining about low pay and having their teaching load cut which means they can lose their health coverage. According to Variety 75% of the 248 adjunct faculty members have signed cards to join a union.

Apparently, adjuncts who teach two classes make around \$22,000 a year and are eligible for health insurance. The organizers of the drive to form a union claim the university has recently started cutting second classes, so that instructors no longer qualify. One teacher complained, "One student pays more money to take my class than I am paid to teach it."

DO YOU HAVE AN OPINION ABOUT DUBBING ANIMATED FEATURES? A friend wrote, "I saw *The Boy and the Heron* last night. It is top flight Miyazaki with unexpected imaginative twists every few minutes. I prefer the dubbed version, very well done, so I can concentrate on the stunning visuals. This is a big screen experience." How do you feel about this issue? Send comments to karlcohen@earthlink.net

THE ACADEMY HAS ANNOUNCED SEVERAL OF THEIR SHORT LISTS These are the list of films in each category from which the 5 nominated films will be selected. In the Animated Short Film category for the 96th Academy Awards 93 films qualified in the category and 15 made the list. Members of the Short Films and Feature Animation Branch voted to determine the shortlist and a second vote will be held to determine the nominees. The films, listed in alphabetical order by title, are: *Boom, Eeva, Humo (Smoke), I'm Hip, A Kind of Testament, Koerkorter (Dog Apartment), Letter to a Pig, Ninety-Five Senses, Once upon a Studio, Our Uniform, Pachyderme, Pete, 27, War Is Over! Inspired by the Music of John & Yoko, and Wild Summon.*

**'MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH MARRIAGE'
IS ON THE ANIMATED FEATURE LIST FOR
AN OSCAR!**

We are officially running for the Oscars. *My Love Affair With Marriage* by **Signe Baumane** is one of 33 films that has qualified for **The Academy Awards** in the **Best Animated Feature** category and it's the **ONLY** one written AND directed by a woman.

The voting starts on January 11th and ends January 16th. Nominations are announced January 23rd. We are well aware of the impossibility of an independent film running against big studio productions, but we feel we owe it to you, our backers, and to all independent animators with big dreams. Dreams may not always come true, but they can make you see the possibilities and inspire action.

My Love Affair With Marriage is also running in two categories for the **Annie Awards** (important animation awards) in Los Angeles: **Best Independent Animated Feature** and **Best Original Song**. The Annie nominations are announced on January 11th.

More good news: the *My Love Affair With Marriage* soundtrack composed by the very talented **Kristian Sensini** is out on **Spotify**! The soundtrack includes Kristian's Oscar-contending score along with all 24 songs (lyrics by Signe Baumane), including [Lion / My Love Affair With Marriage](#), the Oscar and Annie-contending end-credits song. The Spotify album link is <https://open.spotify.com/album/11CkAAWe7tun26hCN3d4I2>

‘NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS’ HAS JOINED 874 OTHER FILMS BEING PRESERVED BY THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS Henry Selick’s and Tim Burton’s stop-motion animated musical *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) was one of 25 motion pictures that have recently been selected to be preserved by the Library of Congress’s National Film Registry. Disney’s *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) also just made the list of 25 films. There are now 875 films on the registry that was created to preserve the nation’s film heritage.



‘NY TIMES’ ARTICLE ON TOMMY STATHES, COLLECTOR AND EXHIBITORS OF SILENT ANIMATION Tommy is doing his best to keeping 16mm screenings of silent and early sound cartoons alive. He has around 4,000 films in his collection and does shows frequently in the NY City area. Read full story here: <http://tinyurl.com/33mt59hr>

SEE ‘POLITICAL ASYLUM’ BY THE MYSTERIOUS JIM MIDDLETON <https://vimeo.com/856397514/319a8ddb9b>

ASIFA-SF IS A VOLUNTEER RUN ASSOCIATION

Newsletter Editor: Karl Cohen

Contributors include Nancy Denney-Phelps, Paul Naas, Jim Middleton and other friends of ASIFA

Proofreaders Jim Middleton, Scott Kravitz and Paul Naas

Special thanks to Nancy Denney-Phelps who represents our chapter on the international ASIFA board. Emily Berk is our webmaster, and Eihway Su keeps our email list and does a dozen other things.

ASIFA-SF is a chapter of: Association Internationale du Film d’Animation with over 40 chapters around the world. Now that we are supposedly post-Covid we had hopes of a rebound with live events once more, but that isn’t happening yet.

TO KEEP THE CHAPTER ALIVE UNTIL WE CAN FIND VOLUNTEERS TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN WITH LIVE AND/OR ONLINE PROGRAMS WE ARE OFFERING A

FREE TEMPORARY MEMBERSHIP

NEW MEMBERS NEEDED, TELL OTHERS TO JOIN FOR FREE ISSUES

HELP BUILD UP OUR MAILING LIST AGAIN. THAT WILL GET YOU OUR MONTHLY NEWSLETER AND WHATEVER SCREENINGS THAT ASIFA-SF MEMBERS GET INVITED TO.

Just let us know, new members are welcomed.

Part of the reason for this offer is our website is screwed up. It isn't accepting membership payments now, but we may ask for dues later this year. Also, our inactive Bank of America branch office is closing.

IF YOU WANT TO HELP SUPPORT ASIFA-INTERNATIONAL THEY ASK \$15 A YEAR. International dues have supported a student award (1,000 Euros), a website, newsletter and other things. Send check to Karl Cohen, international dues, 478 Frederick, SF CA 94117 and the money will be forwarded to them.

PLEASE VOLUNTEER We want to hold in-person and online events again, but nobody is stepping forward to make that happen. I'm now in my 80s and want ASIFA-SF to grow again under new cooperative leadership. We need help to do that. I'm close to finishing my book *Amazing Animation* and need time to complete it, so I can only do so much. We need person(s) or a small committee to choose future events, to invite the guest(s) and possibly arrange for the visuals. If we do online events, we need somebody who knows the technology well enough so the event (on zoom?) will run smoothly. If we do in-person events. We need someone to reserve the space, make sure it has the equipment needed, etc.

Ideas, comments, add your name to our mailing list or if you wish to volunteer, contact

karlcohen@earthlink.net or call me (415) 386-1004

Our broken website and blog is: www.asifa-sf.org