



‘WOLFWALKERS’ SHOULD BE A STUNNING LOOKING MASTERPIECE. It’s opening in select theaters on November 13th before hitting AppleTV+ worldwide on December 11th. It is already a critically-acclaimed animated feature film that was directed by two-time Academy Award-nominated director Tomm Moore and his co-director Ross Stewart.

In a time of superstition and magic, a young apprentice hunter, Robyn Goodfellowe, journeys to Ireland with her father to wipe out the last wolf pack. While exploring the forbidden lands outside the city walls, Robyn befriends a free-spirited girl, Mebh, a member of a mysterious tribe rumored to have the ability to transform themselves into wolves by night. As they search for Mebh’s missing mother, Robyn uncovers a secret that draws her further into the enchanted world of the *Wolfwalkers* and risks turning her into the very thing her father is tasked to destroy.

See the trailer at <http://www.animationscoop.com/official-trailer-cartoon-saloons-wolfwalkers/>



‘HOLLYWOOD REPORTER’ GIVES ‘SOUL’ A RAVE REVIEW! “Featuring possibly the best soundtrack in a Pixar film since the first *Toy Story*, *Soul* sports a jazz score that is not just an adornment to the story or an emotional enhancement, but an utterly integral part of the narrative. Joe's talent for improvisation, and for listening to others, are key to his development as a character and foundational to what he manages to teach.”

“At the same time, the animation finds a way of embedding the music right into the colors and shapes of the film that's pure magic and pays homage to the rhythms and phrasing of jazz and hip hop artists, some of whom appear as voice actors or musicians in the film (including Questlove, Daveed Diggs and John Batiste). The last, best known for his appearances on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, composed and arranged the jazz numbers that are layered in with the original score written by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross; per the film's press notes, reference footage of Batiste playing was used to make sure every note Joe plays in the film was accurate. The hand animation - fluttering, graceful, lightning-fast - will be studied by students of the medium with awe in years to come.”

“It's all so dazzling that it takes a few hours for the shine to settle.”



NEW TRAILER FOR PIXAR'S ‘SOUL’ <http://www.animationscoop.com/new-official-trailer-pixars-soul/>

PIXAR'S 'SOUL' BYPASSES THEATERS, SETS DISNEY+ CHRISTMAS DEBUT The animated tentpole will be made available to all Disney+ customers at no extra charge. It will air exclusively on Disney+ on Christmas Day. It was originally going to open in theaters on Nov. 20. The decision to send the movie straight to Disney+ both underscores the precarious nature of movie going amid the ongoing pandemic, and the importance of Disney+ which has amassed more

than 60 million subscribers worldwide.

Apparently the Academy has changed their Oscar rules so that a debut on Disney+ does not exclude *Soul* from participating in the Oscar contest. Both Pixar and Disney have had a long history with the Oscars.

THEATRE OWNERS IN EUROPE ARE UPSET ABOUT 'SOUL' OPENING ON DISNEY+ Cinemas across Europe have expressed their outrage at the decision by [Disney](#) to bypass a big-screen release for the new Pixar animation. *Soul* will debut in Europe on their streaming platform Disney+.

[The International Union of Cinemas \(UNIC\)](#) released a statement saying the decision has “shocked and dismayed all cinema operators.” The statement said: “The vast majority of cinemas across Europe and indeed many regions of the world are now open and able to offer a safe and enjoyable return for audiences. Cinema operators have invested massively in offering the safest possible experience to their audiences on the basis of a promising schedule of new film releases. Once again Disney is delivering another blow to their distributors.”



MICKEY MOUSE IS BACK! IT IS THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 'RUNAWAY BRAIN' *Runaway Brain* was released on August 11th, 1995 on a double bill with Disney's live-action film *A Kid in King Arthur's Court*. It was also released two years later with the live-action *George of the Jungle*. <http://www.animationscoop.com/the-mouse-that-roared-the-25th-anniversary-of-runaway-brain/>

DISNEY WAS ATTACKED FOR PRESENTING MIXED-MESSAGES ABOUT WHERE THEY STAND ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS The women's group Ultra Violet says “Disney executives just spoke at one of the largest women-empowerment symposiums in the country”... but behind the scenes they have **donated** \$203,350 to groups who **want to take away reproductive freedom**. “On the surface, the company celebrates diversity and strong independent women in films like *Coco*, *Moana*, and *Frozen*. Disney wants us to think it has entirely distanced itself from its racist and sexist *Song of the South* and *Sleeping Beauty* days. But 51% of Disney's total political giving in 2020 was to anti-choice candidates or their associated PACs.⁴

ANOTHER TRIP TO THE JURASSIC AGE HAS BEEN DELAYED *Jurassic World: Dominion* will stomp in on June 10, 2022. It was going to be here in 2021. *Jurassic World*, released in 2015 went on to gross \$1.67 billion worldwide and is the sixth-highest-grossing film in cinema history. Also Warner Bros. *The Batman* has been moved from Oct. 1, 2021, to March 4, 2022.

VIRTUAL GLAS Although GLAS got off to a confusing start (I was later told the students were playing a computer game), it was nice to see it open with an abstract computer film, *Ruunpe* by Boris Labbé. He has a Vimeo page with earlier works on it. <https://vimeo.com/borislabbe>. That was followed by *Daughtersy* by Daria Kashcheeva, from the Czech Republic. It received an Academy Award nomination and was in Ron Diamond's 21st Animation Show of Shows. That program ended with Theodore Ushev's *The Physics of Sorrow*, <https://www.nfb.ca/film/physics-of-sorrow/> probably the best film in the festival.

I watched the other 9 programs as well and found the experience to be a mixture of nicely developed films and others that were less interesting to me. I'm glad I had the opportunity to watch virtual GLAS and hope future editions introduce people in the Bay Area to several interesting new faces in animation.

ASIFA CELEBRATED ITS 60TH ANNIVERSARY AT THE WORLD FESTIVAL OF ANIMATED FILM IN VARNA, BULGARIA Nancy Denney-Phelps writes, “The sixteenth edition of the World Animated Film Festival in Varna, Bulgaria, was held from 9 to 13 September, 2020. Due to the pandemic, the international jury worked online, but all the screenings took place with an audience in the big hall of the Festival and Congress Center, located next to the beautiful sea garden.”





Let's Meet Yesterday

HIGHLIGHTS OF ASIFA'S INTERNATIONAL CONTEST FOR BEST STUDENT FILM “The special screening was held to mark the 60th Anniversary of ASIFA. It was a program of works by students who participated in the International Competition for the best student film organized by this association.”



“During the closing ceremony of the festival, Pencho Kunchev, President of ASIFA-Bulgaria, presented the award to Iva Tokmakchieva, a graduate of New Bulgarian University. Her film *Let's Meet Yesterday* was awarded the highest honor at this first-new competition. The jury consisted of Deanna Morse (USA), Nelson Shin (Korea) and Nancy Denney Phelps (USA-Belgium). The award is a framed original drawing from Pencho Kunchev's film *Roses in the Night* together with a cash prize. Hopefully this will become an annual event.



**ANIMA KOM 4 INTERNATIONAL ANIMATION FESTIVAL
6 – 12 JULY 2020, BILBAO, SPAIN By Nancy Denney-Phelps**

Bilbao is always a wonderful city to visit, but when Anima Kon Animation Festival is taking place it is an even more magical place. Festival director Pedro Rivero is not only an excellent programmer and noted scriptwriter, he is also a superb host.

The travel ban for most of Europe ended on 1 July so Nik and I were able to travel to Spain. Aside from the joy of seeing film on the big screen again after almost 6 months of lockdown, we were there to present the Anima Kom Lifetime Achievement Award to the amazing Nina Paley on the opening night of the festival at the festival venue Bilborock. It was also a great pleasure to be with other members of our animation family, although this year there were only a few foreign guests.

Unfortunately, it was not possible for Nina to travel to Spain from the United States so the award had to be presented live via Zoom. Following the presentation of the award all 19 of Nina's short films were shown. She has been invited to

be a guest at next year's festival.



Nina Paley on the big screen accepting her award. L-R, translator Tim Nicholson, Nancy & Nik

Anima Kom showed more than 120 short films in 4 competition categories: professional films, student, animation, the Laboral Kutxa (Basque short films), and music videos, which is a new category this year. There are also awards for the best female director, best script and an innovation prize along with the audience award.

For me the most interesting program was the Basque Film Competition. With a few rare exceptions Basque animation is not screened at many festivals. One of these exceptions is the noted animator Izibene Onederra. Her films have been shown at numerous festivals internationally. Her latest film, *Lursaguak, Scenes for Life* was shown at Ancecy Online this year.



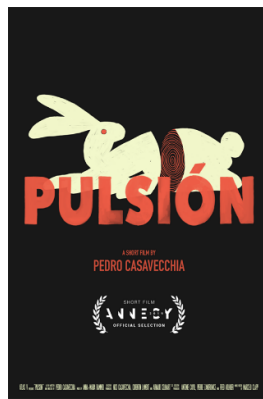
It was also my favorite Basque film at Anima Kom. The extremely dark story is about the role of the human condition in contemporary society. When asked about her 12-minute film, Onederra quoted the French feminist writer Helene Cixous who said, "We are living in times where millions of voles of unknown species are undermining the conceptual basis of an age old culture". The film literally portrays this philosophy. It has no dialogue but the strong images are very unsettling. *Lursaguak.Scenes for Life* requires more than one viewing to cut through all the layers and left me thinking about it long after I saw it. It is a very relevant film given the unsettling times we are living in not just with the Corona Virus but the worldwide political upheaval.



Anima Kom is a festival that spotlights female animators. In addition to the usual award categories the festival also honors the best female director. This year the award went to Nadja Andrsev from Hungary for her film *Symbiosis*. The audience also selected it as their favorite film.

Nadja's 10-minute 2D film titled *Symbiosis*, means living together. In the film a betrayed wife begins to carefully investigate her husband's mistresses, keeping a detailed scrap book with hairs she removes from her husband's clothes, discarded tissues, all manner of personal minutiae. Gradually her jealousy turns to curiosity about the other women who she sees in her mind as gazelles while she herself is a lioness.

Symbiosis is all about obsessions, the husband's constant obsession to conquer new women and the wife's compulsion to learn about the other women. When the wife finally realizes that these other women are no more satisfied with their lives than she is, she finally makes peace with them and accepts that her husband is incapable of fulfilling anyone's desires including his own.



The Grand Prix was awarded to Pedro Casavecchia for the 6-minute dark psychological thriller *Pulsión (Drive)*. The film explores abuse in a dysfunctional family. The dark feelings that a boy has accumulated during his childhood suddenly break loose after his mother's death. From childhood animal abuse the feelings escalate into human death.

Pedro is an Argentine CGI artist now based in London. He has worked in the lighting and environments departments on such films as *Mary Poppins Returns* and *Avengers Endgame*. *Pulsión (Drive)* is his directorial debut. He wrote, directed, and animated most of the production himself.

Along with the competition programs there was KrazyKom. The 2-hour program of 22 films featured crazy, bizarre, and completely astonishing short films such as Patrick Smith's *Candy Shop*. There are 11,926 pharmaceutical drugs available in the world the film tells us. This film shows 2,862 of them in a very fast-paced 2 minutes and 30 seconds.

Also on the program was Guy Charnaux's 8 minute, 3 act epic about a 7 year old boy who can't sleep. He hears something coming from his parent's room, some loud and disturbing noises. What can it be?

Zinebi, the Bilbao International Festival of Documentary, Short, and Animated Film, is held annually in November. During Anima Kom a program called Zinebi Women screened films by female animation directors whose short films were screened at last year's Zinebi Festival.

Masterclasses were presented by Juan Luis Gonzalez, Amy Winfrey and Peter Merryman. This year Nik and I were honored to open the festival before the award to introduce Nina with our Toons and Tunes program. In it we trace the history of animation from its early beginnings with the Fleischer Brothers down to the present through the musical sound tracks on the films. Along the way we screened films and talked about why their music is important or innovative.

For instance, *Joie de Vivre*, the 1934 Hector Hoppin and Anthony Gross film, was the first animated film to have its own original symphonic score. The music was composed by Hungarian composer and pianist Tibor Harsanyi. *Joie de Vivre* is such a lovely film. It tells the story of two lovely young women who go skinny dipping. They see a young man who they think is spying on them. In their hurry to dress one of the young ladies forgets a shoe. When the young man runs after them to return the lost shoe the girls run from him. The line drawings of the two young girls show them moving in tandem through a series of adventures until the young man finally catches up with them. This is such a lovely, beautifully drawn film. Unfortunately, it is seldom screened.

Lighting artist Juan Luis Gonzales from Madrid was senior lighting artist on the film *Klaus*. He is also a painter. In his presentation he talked about the importance of light in the visual arts, especially in cinema and animation. After a general discussion about why light is one of the most powerful tools to use when telling a story, Juan Luis went on to focus in on his work on *Klaus*. When asked, "What was the biggest challenge of your work on *Klaus*?", he replied that lighting the hands and hair movement was most difficult. He spent 10 months working on the lighting. He also told us that this was his first job on a serious animated film, but that his background in painting was most valuable in his film work.

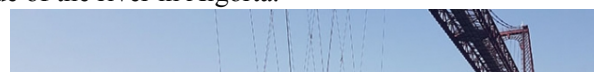
Following a screening of the "Free Churro" episode of *BoJack Horseman*, series directors Amy Winfrey and Peter Merryman joined us via Zoom. They talked about their experiences on the production of the hit Netflix series. The pair explained the process of creating an episode, from the first visualization of a script to creating the story boards, designs, and final animation. They told the audience that every episode has a similar process, but always presents new challenges and opportunities to the crew.

No trip to Anima Kom would be complete without lots of fabulous meals and gatherings at local watering holes. Bilbao has wonderful food, and being a late-night city, there are many fun bars. Pedro, consummate host that he is, also planned two excursions to the nearby seaside.

As a group we took the train to Algorta, 14 kilometers north of Bilbao on the Nervion River. There we were met by two of Pedro's friends who live in the town. Ana Hormaetxea is a scriptwriter and was a member of the Anika Kom script writing jury, and Eguxkine Aranzibia, a writer.

Our first stop on our tour was the historic Vizcaya Bridge, the oldest hanging bridge in the world. Designed in 1893 by the Basque architect Alberto de Palacio, the bridge connects Algorta to the town of Portugalete across the river.

The area around Portugalete was the site of iron mines, and the impoverished miners and their families lived in that town while the mine owners lived in splendor on the other side of the river in Algorta.





De Palacio planned the 50-meter-high pillars on either side of the bank to ensure that the tall ships of that era could pass unimpeded. The bridge has an upper pedestrian walkway. Suspended from it is a gondola which can carry up to 6 cars and dozens of passengers from one side of the river to the other. It was the first bridge in the world to carry people and vehicles in a suspended gondola. The bridge is still in use, running every 8 minutes, 24 hours a day. In 2006 the Vizcaya Bridge became a world heritage site.

From the foot of the bridge we walked along the sea wall to Getxo. Along the way we passed many of the fabulous mansions, which are still privately owned and occupied. Eguxkine was a wonderful tour guide, telling Nik and me many facts about the architects and different styles of architecture of these fabulous 19th and 20th century homes.

The three of us caught up with the rest of the group outside of a beach side restaurant where we had tapas and drinks and relaxed while some of the party were on the beach. From the restaurant we went up the hill to the old village where we enjoyed a wonderful, traditional meal out under an ancient tree.

On another day we were once again taken by train, this time to Plentzia. After a walk up the city steps we arrived at the center of the old city and stopped for a drink and snacks at the neighborhood bar in the shadow of the 16th century Church of Santa Maria Magdalena. Then we descended to the other side of the hill to walk along the Plentzia River. The river runs into the Bay of Biscay. Nik, who I have always suspected is part fish, and several other members of the group took advantage of the opportunity to swim while others enjoyed a cold beer at a beachside bar.



Our new masks from Bilbao

Plentzia is also home to Bodega Crusoe Treasure, an underwater winery founded in 2013. The bottled wines are closed with a special stopper and sealed. The bottles are then lowered from a boat by crane 20 meters under the sea where they rest for 6 to 12 months in specially built metal cages. A member of the winery in a wetsuit then goes down to check the sensors that monitor the temperature and water pressure around the cages. The conditions underwater in total darkness and constant temperatures are thought to speed up the aging process and add complexity to the wines. I am sorry to say I cannot attest firsthand to the taste of the wine since prices for a bottle begin at 58 euros. You can learn more about the underwater aging process and see more photos at: underwaterwine.com

It was a wonderful 8 days in Bilbao, full of so many lovely memories. There is no way I can thank Pedro enough for inviting us to be part of the festival. His hospitality and generosity know no ends. I also must thank Isa Molinas for her friendship and so many shared laughs as well as taking good care of us. A big thank you goes to the entire crew of Anima Kom who worked so hard to make sure that everything went off without a hitch given the difficult conditions they had to work under to put the festival online and prepare the Bilborock theatre by blocking off every other seat, making sure that people kept their masks on and used the hand sanitizer when we entered the theatre. The Bilborock Theatre is a former church that is now a music and theatre venue. Hopefully things will be back to normal in time for next year's Anima Kom which is scheduled for the end of June/beginning of July next year.

You can learn more about Anima Kom and how to submit your film to the next festival at:

www.animakom.com

Films by Bill Plimpton



A LOOK INSIDE THE MIND OF THE MATURING BILL PLYMPTON by Karl Cohen

I hope you find this archival interview interesting

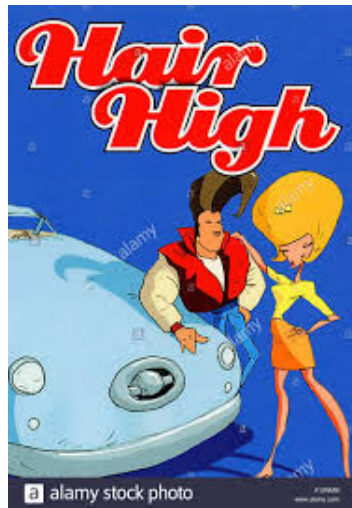
Bill Plympton, who is certainly the most important independent animator in the US, was in San Francisco for a screening of *Idiots and Angels* in November, 2008. His latest feature is an impressive departure from his earlier works. It is a sophisticated, mature work and Bill notes, "It's the best reviewed film I've ever had."

Variety called it "his best animated feature to date...may attract the larger arthouse audiences that have thus far eluded Plympton in his feature forays."

A reviewer for *Zoom In Online*, who saw it at the Tribeca Film Festival, wrote, "Though dark and twisted in many parts, the film is simultaneously gorgeous and emotionally fulfilling... Dark yet hopeful, mournful yet celebratory, *Idiots and Angels* is exploratory animation for adults to equate to the joy of discovery their kids find in any Disney film."

The reviewer for *Quiet Earth* (online) says, "*Idiots and Angels* is a beautiful animation with striking imagery and a unique ability to change its tone and message in a heartbeat. What starts off as a comment on banality turns into a noir-ish thriller, then transforms into a morality tale before surging head on into romance. It's also a superhero film and a comedy.... Plympton has an excellent eye for imaginative and outrageous imagery."

I've been a good friend of Bill since 1987 when ASIFA-SF held an in-person screening of his work. He had come to California to attend the Academy Awards (he has since received another nomination). I saw his new feature at Ottawa 08 and was anxious to interview Bill about the new direction of his work.



I began my interview by asking, "why the switch in directions?" That's a good question. *Hair High*, which I think is my best film, had big name voices, was shot on 35mm, I spent a lot of money on it and it had some of the best animation we've ever done, but it just didn't perform well. I made some money on it, but not a lot. So I just said fuck it. I'm just going to do an indulgent film with a tiny budget. I'm just going to do pencil and paper, minimal color, no voices and no big name actors; just music. I'll make it dark, the way I want it.

For some reason people feel this film is much more personal. I think that is why people are reacting so well to it. It's more Bill Plympton than my other films. My earlier features were full of sex, violence and wacky humor. This film is not so much wacky humor; it's just a more personal film. People are saying I'm growing up; I'm maturing. I still love that wacky humor and I want to come back to it, I don't want to give it up. I still love surreal humor like the Marx Bros. and W.C. Fields. I will come back to it.

For now I'll continue to do these darker films. I'm working on one right now. (*Cheatin' 2014*.) It's about jealousy. I'll use the same technique, the same kind of look; it's a personal story. I don't think there is going to be any dialog. I like it without dialog. It's about a couple that loves each other madly and desperately, but through miscommunication and other people messing with their relationship they begin to get jealous of each other. It becomes very violent and twisted. Eventually they'll come back together of course. It's sort of the same feel as *The Postman Always Rings Twice* with John Garfield (1946). It's that kind of sexual tension. The storyboard is almost done. I'll start animating in February. I hope I'll be showing it in 2010.

The making of *Idiots and Angels* was so easy, so smooth, so cheap, so painless, that I want to do it again. I still have some big time scripts. I want to get some big money for them and do them as real serious productions.





I'm getting a lot of interest from European investors now. The French pre-buy my films. Each film is pre-bought and that money helps finance them. They are buying all rights in advance, theatrical, TV, cable, pay-per-view, DVD, Internet, whatever. I don't mind doing that. Now I'm getting the Dutch government interested in pre-buying rights for their country. Spain and Germany might also be interested, so if I can get three or four countries pre-buying, I don't have to put my own money into it. That would help me and I could pay my employees more, which I think is important. They do a really good job.

Where did the story for *Idiots and Angels* come from? I don't know. I have no idea. I wish I could remember what inspired it. The first thing I remember was in Lille, France after a festival showing of *Hair High* I was walking back with an intern who was showing me the way and he asked 'what is your next film.' I said off of the top of my head, 'an asshole guy wakes up one morning with wings on his back,' and he said that's a good idea. I don't know where it came from, but I started thinking that has possibilities, so that night I started sketching it, doing character designs, possible plot ideas and it just flowed. It came out so easily, so quickly. Scary!



I don't know why I was thinking about wings. I had seen *Wings of Desire* 15 or 20 years ago. I think that might have been an influence. I don't know why I was thinking of wings, but you know animation is great for flying people. *Peter Pan* is a classic. So are *Dumbo* and *Superman*. There is something about animation and flying people. There is no trickery involved, just drawing.

Redemption is a theme I wanted to talk about in the film. I don't like to tell morals or lecture people, but the moral to the film is that everybody has invisible wings on their backs and this film sort of shows you how to find those wings. You have to discover those wings, to use those wings, to exercise them, to treat them well and that is what this film is about. This guy is learning how to use them and fly away from idiocy.

There is a certain amount of religious overtones. I'm not a religious person, but the idea of dying and being reborn is one of those universal ideas that people can relate to. I think that's one of the reasons people like this film. It speaks to a lot of issues. I don't talk about any specific religion or any specific idea. That's why it is a mysterious film. It's just this guy who's totally fucked up and he learns to, or decides to change his life and I think that is a theme people can relate to.

Where did the dark seedy bar come from? I don't think of you as someone who hangs out in such places. I remembered about a month ago, that when I was 16 growing up in Oregon, there was a grocery store about two miles from where I lived. I was a box boy in that store and right next to that grocery store was a bar. Sometimes I would deliver stuff to the bar. I'd walk in there and it was such a mysterious place. It was almost like a Greek Orthodox Church, very dark and there was smoke coming up from the cigarettes similar to the smoke in my film. There were 3 or 4 people in this dingy place including a floozy in the corner. I don't know if she was a hooker or some divorcee looking for a cheap thrill. Then there was a guy at the bar who probably came in at noon and started drinking. I thought what a mysterious lifestyle that is. What kind of people go to a bar at noon and drink there all day long? The images of that seedy lifestyle left a strong impression. That is what made me design that bar. The bar didn't have a really high ceiling with rows and rows of bottles. That was added as an artistic fantasy, but other than that the bar was rather similar. Just a simple square room with a dark door that had a little diamond shaped window that light would come in. When someone would open the door the whole place would be bathed in this light that poured in through the doorway. I love drawing that kind of atmosphere, that kind of chiaroscuro that takes place in a bar. That's why I designed it that way.





It's a totally different environment from your previous films. Yes, that may be why my films don't sell. I don't know. I like bright films; I like bright humor. I always believe humor should be bright and this film has a darker humor, a darker vision a more mysterious feeling. It's a kind of cartoon noir, which may be why people seem to relate to it better.

Another interesting aspect of this film that I was really afraid of in my earlier work, but it works really well here, is there are a lot of places in the film that are really slow and very contemplative. For example the shot where he walks into the bar the first time, you see him open the door and you hear this peddal steel music as he's walking to the bar while the bartender mixes him a drink. It's a long shot, maybe longer than a minute. I was really digging the music and I just loved that anticipation that something is going to happen. In my past films I was always afraid of long slow moments in a movie. Since then I decided I'm just going to play it the way I want to play it. People like it. I even got a question last night about that sequence and how it came about.

Another sequence that is very slow is when the guy drives his car into the garage, the garage door shuts and you hear the engine running. I always wonder when people realize, 'oh my god, he's killing himself.' I always wonder when that connects with the audience. That's a long shot too, maybe 40 seconds.

The idea of one drawing held for 40-seconds is great when you are an independent animator and you don't have any money. If I could do a whole film like that there would be 200 drawings in the whole film. I'm always looking for ways to economize. It makes the story really interesting when you show stuff. It goes behind the vision. The picture is real slow and people get relaxed and start to get into the atmosphere.

Another thing I've had trouble figuring out is timing and pacing. I followed the garage sequence with that crazy scene where the guy rides her back. It has a real slow part and then a real fast part. I like that changing of speeds.

How have the festivals liked it? I've been invited to a lot of festivals. I love it. Fortunately for me Biljana Labovic, my producer, has gone to places that I didn't have time to go to. She came out to the Mill Valley Festival, introduced the film and had a great time.

Have you been to Korea? I wasn't able to go, it conflicted with another festival. I have a lot of fans in Korea. They make great films there and they really love animation.

I went to Bosnia; a weird experience. It was a big hit in Greece. I went to Romania and it was a huge hit. We had packed sell out shows. They wanted to take us to Dracula's Castle, but I did not have time to go there, but we did see the People's Palace, Nicolae Ceausescu's folly. It is a monstrous palace that he built to his own ego. Supposedly it is the biggest building in the world after the Pentagon... Meanwhile people were starving. It was beautiful, but I think it is the building that brought him down. People were just so disgusted that he spent so much money on himself.

I'm going to Dubai in a couple of weeks. I think they are going to censor it, cut out the nudity. There is no sex, but some bare breasts. That's what they told me. I'm going to France to do some publicity for the premiere. (Since this interview the film has opened in several French cities.) I'll make another small tour in January and then I'll get started on my new film.



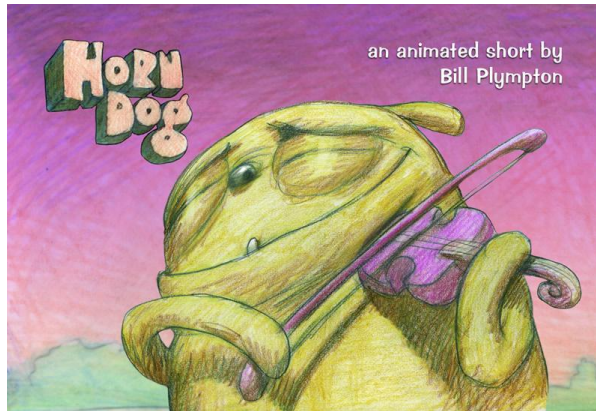
I think it is a breakthrough film; a totally different direction and hopefully it will expose me to a bigger audience. Older people come out of the film loving it. I've never had people 50, 60, 70-years-old as fans before. Also women generally stayed away from my earlier features, but they love the message of this film, the look of the film, the idea/concept of the film. That's a new thing for me, which is why I think it is a breakthrough film.





I think *Idiots and Angels* is really different from what is out there on the screens of America. I think it's a really fresh kind of look and idea. I was hoping the distributors would see the same thing, but apparently they are really conservative now. I've had screenings for all of the big distributors and they have all turned it down. The major distributors like the film, but they think that it's too dark for their commercial market. It's really too bad. I'll have to go with a smaller one. We've had a number of offers, but they've all been very cheap. I wanted to get at least \$100,000 so I could get the money back that I spent on it. We did get a nice advance from France and it looks like Spain is going to come up with some good money.

I've resigned myself to never being a blockbuster kind of director. I'll always be like a Jim Jarmusch of animation. Just under the radar, making good films that a lot of people like, but never a huge number of them. That's OK. I like making these films. I've got a lot of fans. I make money, I make ends meet, I travel the world over, so I couldn't ask for anything more. I'm happy.



What else besides promoting *Idiots and Angels* around the world is happening in your life? "I'm working on my "quadrilogy," my fourth dog film. He falls in love with another dog, he has obvious romantic problems and as always, the results are a complete disaster. It's called *Horn Dog*. I'll continue working on it as soon as I get back to NY. It's all story-boarded and ready to go. I just have to animate and color it. We are hoping to get that one ready for Annecy."

I've been told the dog is your Mickey Mouse. "He is. He's extremely popular. Even today at the 1 pm screening people came up to me and said, "I love the dog. I'm so glad you put the dog in the film." The dog has an amazing number of fans. I'm happy he is so popular. But I don't have a big studio. I can only afford to do one dog film a year. Every year I'll do another dog film."

"There is another film that I just finished. It's a real quickie that I did for the Internet. It's a Christmas film called *Santa, the Fascist Years*. It's a low budget film and the advance will be enough to cover my costs. I did it in three weeks. It's three minutes long. It's about Santa becoming a Nazi and taking over the world." He chuckles and says, "Very twisted."

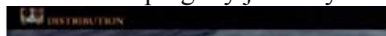
Is *Plus Annecy* going to continue this year? "It was a little small last year for a couple reasons. One was my involvement with having both the feature and a short in competition, so I was really busy with those two things and I was on a panel. I really couldn't devote a great deal of time to it. Also we had to move it to a café and the facilities were not that good. Tell people to send in their films that were rejected by Annecy. Send them to me or to Nancy Phelps and we will be happy to look at them."

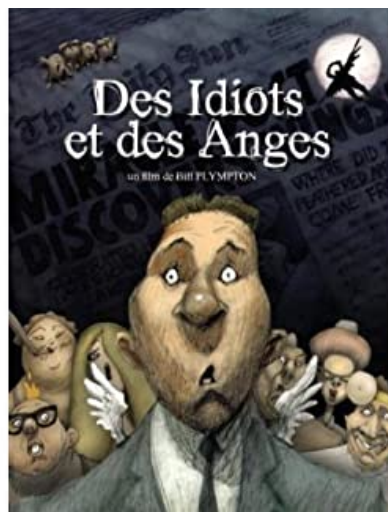
Tell me about *Plympton's Picks*, the program you organized and showed in LA. "That was a big success. We didn't get a huge audience, but we showed some really good films, the Lemmie (*theater company*) was happy with it, and a lot of people got films that qualified for Oscar nominations. It's a great way to get around Lemmie charging \$500 for each film to qualify it for consideration by the Academy. It's expensive, so we decided to put together *Plympton's Picks*, the best films this year for animation and it was promoted as such. We did it for free. The theater kept all the money, which is fine. I'm not doing it to get rich. It's a good service for films that I think are really good."

Are there any new additions to your product line? "I'm working on four books. One is with Kanye West. We are selecting 12 of his favorite songs and I'm doing big double spread illustrations to illustrate each song. Then he dissects the lyrics as to their meaning, where the slang comes from. He translates them into regular English so you can see what's behind the song. It's history, and it's pretty cool. It should be out in 2009."

"Then we are doing a storyboard book for *Idiots and Angels*. I don't know when that is coming out. Hopefully when it comes out in theaters. Then I'm doing a children's book based on *Fan and the Flower* for a publisher who wants it. And finally, a book I'm really excited about, a Bill Plympton coffee table book for another publisher. It could be a really important book. Except for the Kanye West book these are all in very early stages of development. I haven't signed any contracts yet. I hope something will happen."

"Although I'm doing a new dog film and developing my jealousy feature, I'm concentrating my





efforts on getting *Idiots and Angels* out to cinemas and making my money back. That's a full time job. Just because you make a film doesn't mean it's going to be a success. You really have to promote it and hustle. You need to meet people and make deals. Talking money and contracts can be really dreary, a boring part of the filmmaking process, but an important part of the process."

Do you have much time to sleep? "Yea, I do. The most intense time is when I'm drawing the film. I get up at six in the morning and I'm drawing till seven or eight at night, every day, even on weekends. I'm in this sort of rush or high, this burning passion to get this stuff out, so my social life is zero unfortunately. But I'm excited about the film."

"When I finished drawing *Idiots and Angels* in January (2008), I slept for 2 or 3 weeks. I did nothing. Then other people took over doing the editing, sound, coloring and all that stuff. I can relax. Now it's wonderful. I'm traveling, doing a short film and starting to write the new feature. I have a very easy schedule. "

How long does it take you to do a dog film? "Probably about six to eight weeks. It takes about a week to storyboard it, perhaps two weeks to draw it, a week to color it and then postproduction. "

"The features take about three years. A year to storyboard them, a year to draw 25,000 drawings, give or take a thousand, and then about six months for post production which is coloring, compositing, editing, sound effects, music; all that stuff. The good thing with *Idiots and Angels* is that there were no voices so that made things go really fast. Voices slow a film production down a lot. You have to do lip-synch, record the voices; everything has to be timed out exactly. You waste a lot of time doing technical stuff."

"When you don't do voices it's like silent films. It is pure visual story telling. That's one thing I like about this film. It's much more poetic. It's pure visual storytelling. You don't have to listen carefully to the dialog and get caught up in it. It is pictures and music. It's more emotive, more subtle, more mysterious in terms of storytelling. It hits your soul a little bit deeper."

"In my new film, the jealousy film, I looked a lot at Orson Welles' *A Touch of Evil*, because it has a sort of border town kind of feeling to it; a sort of sleazy, small dusty town. I wanted to get that kind of effect. I like Orson Welles' camera angles. His films are kind of like cartoons. His character, especially the sheriff in *A Touch of Evil*, is a cartoon nasty. I love that guy. Welles could have been an animation director, the next Walt Disney."

(Notes: Since recording this interview Bill's *Idiots and Angels* has opened in France along with an art gallery show in Paris that covers 20 years of his work. He says, "This is a unique look at the evolving art style of an outrageous independent animator.")

Bill's *Santa, the Fascist Years*, a new short about Santa Claus' hidden past, can be seen on the Internet at iTunes.com. It has a voiceover by actor Matthew Modine. It can be seen along with his music video for Parson Brown titled *Mexican Standoff* for \$1.99.

Bill's travels in late January took him to the Sundance Film Festival where they showed *Hot Dog*. Then he was off to Sweden, where they showed his latest feature and several shorts. Then he went to LA where he attended the Annie Awards. *Hot Dog* was nominated for Best Animated Short Subject. In late February he was at Anima, the Brussel's Cartoon and Animation Festival where they showed *Hot Dog* and *Idiots and Angels*. His feature has also been booked this year by festivals in Canada, Italy, Finland, Turkey, Mexico, Portugal, Hong Kong and in several cities in the US.

On our way to dinner Bill remembered he hadn't talked about his selection of music for *Idiots and Angels* so the tape recorder was turned on while we waited for the food to arrive. "While I'm doing the drawings I'm listening to a lot of music. It usually corresponds with the mood of the artwork I'm doing. If I'm doing a romantic scene I'm listening to romantic music or if I'm doing a chase scene I'm listening to fast upbeat music. For many of the bar sequences I listened to Tom Waits. I thought I'd love to get Tom Waits involved with this film as he would be perfect, but I don't know him. I do know Jim Jaermusch who is a really good guy who loves my stuff. So I called him up and said I've got this new film, it's really dark and I'd love to get some of Tom Waits' music in it. I asked if I could show him the film and if he liked it could he send it on to Tom Wait. He called back a couple weeks later and said he loved the film and was going to send it on."

“About two weeks later I got an E-mail from Tom’s wife who said Tom loves the film, you can use any song you want in the film, just let us know which ones you want. I thought ‘Yea, that’s great.’

His publisher charged a minimum fee, I can’t tell you the price, but it was very, very low. So we have two of his songs in there and people love it, especially in Europe. He is a god in Europe.

“We also have music by Pink Martini from Portland, Oregon. My brother Peter Plympton works for the band. He is their sound engineer and he travels everywhere they go. I’ve known Thomas Lauderdale for a while; he did a cameo in *Guns on the Clackamas*. Now that he is a big star he is like Tom Waits; he believes in projects that are artistic and have meaning to him. He’s not out there to make a quick buck. He wants to support projects that he feels are really exciting and interesting. So he sold us the rights to two or three songs at a very low cost.”

“Then I have Larry Campbell who played the pedal steel in *The Tune*. That was before he was big. I wanted Larry to do some music. He has become the hottest pedal steel player in the country. He plays with Bob Dylan, Emmy Lou Harris, Phil Lesh. I had to beg him to give me an hour of his time. He was nice to take an hour out of his schedule to do it. His music is in the scene where the man walks into the bar to get his drink. It’s a beautiful, beautiful sequence.”

“At one time I wanted to include a Moby song. I’m an old friend of Moby and he loves my animation. He’s a big animation fan. He told me I could use his music for free; go take it. So we had a song all planned out and we had his contract, but we didn’t have his publisher’s contract. We were negotiating with them for about two months and they kept raising the price. It was up to about two thousand dollars or something. I kept saying. ‘I can’t pay it. I don’t have the money. The whole music budget was \$10,000 dollars and there are 30 songs in it’. Moby said ‘don’t worry, I can get it for free.’ It never happened. The day before we scheduled the transfer I had to say sorry, too late, I’m going to replace it with another song. It was for the sequence near the beginning when the cars drive to work and there is a traffic jam. It was a nice Moby song and it would have helped us to promote the film, but we had to get rid of it.”

“No distributor would take the feature without contracts for everything. They have to. They can get sued if they distribute the film. If somebody gets sued they are not going to sue me, I have very shallow pockets. They will sue the distributor. They have all the money so they are very careful about rights.”

“Music is a very important part of the film. I want to do a music CD of the film and that might come out next year. When I obtained the music rights for the film it also included rights to use it in an *Idiots and Angels* CD. That was the deal. They knew I had no money. All the rights they signed away are just for this movie. I can’t use the music for other purposes or resell my rights, but I can bring a CD out as long as its *Idiots and Angels* music. They approved that. That’s my music story.”

The Final Word

When you were making *Idiots and Angels*, were you thinking about whom your audience was? No, it’s a very self-indulgent film. I didn’t give a fuck, I was going to make a film for me and not worry about jokes and pretty colors. I was going to do something raw and cheap. One of the influences was Roland Topour. If you see some <https://vimeo.com/219987800> of his work you know it’s full of crosshatching and kind of crude. It is raw, primitive and naive. That was sort of my style that I wanted to follow for this film. I was just going to draw it fast and rough. If I made a mistake I was just going to erase it and redraw it again and keep drawing it until it looks good and not worry about if was an appealing vision for the audience. As long as I think it’s appealing, if I think it’s interesting to look at, that’s all I care about.



I asked who he thought his audience might be when he was making it. “I was hoping it would be similar to *Eraserhead* or *Strangers in Paradise*, an underground, dark film for a college kind of audience. When people see it they really fall in love with it, but it’s such a different film for me that I knew I was going to have to get a different audience for it.”

“Emotionally it is a very successful film. I wanted to create something more soulful, deeper. In the original storyboard for *Idiots and Angels* it was more of an adventure with a lot more action, a lot more locations, different plots going on. I said to myself, ‘No, no, no, that’s wrong. Keep it right at the bar, five or six characters at the most, keep it really internal, personal.’ I cut out all that action stuff. I threw away a lot because I really wanted to make this thing really simple, as simple as can be. It paid off.”

48TH ANNUAL ANNIE AWARDS TO GO VIRTUAL ASIFA-Hollywood announced today that its 48th Annie Awards ceremony will be a “virtual event, to be held on Friday, April 16, 2021.



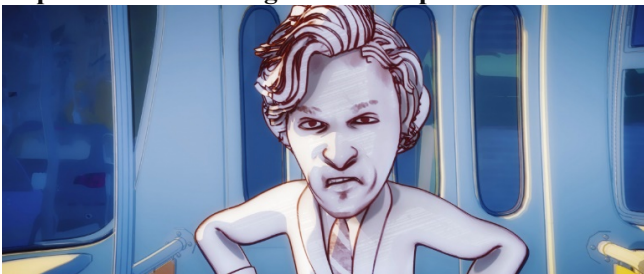
Chris Cross by Caroline Hamann and Fritz Panzen

CHICO'S ANIMATION FESTIVAL WAS FULL OF WONDERFUL SURPRISES My favorite film was *Chris Cross*, a bizarre humorous film about national borders and love from Caroline Hamann. She studied in England, has a studio in Germany that produces ads and storyboards and she animated on Tim Burton's *Corpse Bride*. Its possible her new film was inspired by the lack of freedom to travel in Berlin years ago. The silhouette film isn't online, but there is a video of her making a cutout character that shows how she hinges arms and legs. <https://vimeo.com/219987800>

I also admired *Yellow Rose* by Xin Li that is painted on glass. There is a clip on painting it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDz1P0m-lt4> and the film is <https://youtu.be/okNdiW615cc> A second film by Xin Li, *Winter*, won the best student film award. He lives in Australia.

The CG film that impressed me the most was *Redemption* by Seora Hong, an Academy of Art student studying with Derik Flood and she has been an intern at Pixar. It starts with a man contemplating jumping off a tall building's roof.

The tension really builds when suddenly...I have a fear of heights so the film made me nervous. <https://www.seorahong.com/redemption/>



The film *Metro6* by Geoff Hecht "follows Zak, a character who doesn't understand the true sense of community," Hecht explained. "He's absorbed in technology and doesn't notice anyone around him. It was never Zak's intention to take the bus on this fateful day, but the lessons he learns on his 8-minute, action-packed bus ride are both unexpected and deeply important."

This film is too over the top in intensity for a lot of people, but it captures the characters who ride San Francisco's Muni and it hints about who some of the tech people like Zak are, some of the new inhabitants of the city.

<http://metro6film.com/>

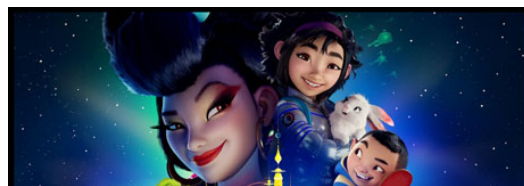
I was also amazed at the number of people working on it. To make the film Hecht collaborated with 78 artists working in 17 different countries. He says, "Today working remotely is a hot-topic. In January of 2018, we started working remotely on *Metro6* through the Artella platform. The platform connected us with artists across the globe to come together and create this film that rivals the quality of a film from a big studio, but without utilizing a standard 'mainstream' look."

Geoff Hecht is a multi-award winning Creative Director, and more recently a multi-award winning Animation Director, based in San Francisco, California. He has close to 20 years of experience between training and working in animation and over a decade of experience building and leading teams of artists.

Between 2011 and 2018, Geoff founded and co-owned one of the more reputable boutique Animation and VFX studios in San Francisco, Hectic Digital, which was sold to InVision Communications in July of 2018.

As for the festival's top prize, the best in show winner was *Kapaemahu*. See a trailer for it at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iASTdTL_vAA

Animation Chico, founded in 2015, has in its brief existence become an international event with entries of short films from around the world. The entries came from independent animators, professionals and students. <https://www.animationchico.com/>





GLEN KEANE'S 'OVER THE MOON' HAS PREMIERED ON NETFLIX *The Guardian* reviewer wrote, “For a while, I was absorbed in this dazzling K-poppy lunar universe with its biker chickens and floating frogs. It’s all very spectacular – but nothing much happens in the second half, and back on Earth, the movie’s message about loss and the power of letting go feels oversweetened, more Disney than Disney. “

Rotten Tomatoes reprints about a dozen lukewarm reviews. The trailer suggests it is too cute and sweet for my taste. They gave it a 73% rating.

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/over_the_moon_2020

COMICS AFTER SCHOOL - FOR KIDS 7 TO 12 <http://www.carasartstudio.com/>



'IRMI' IS AN EMOTIONALLY MOVING FILM EXPERIENCE THAT INCLUDES ANIMATION BY CATHERINE MARGERIN I wanted to watch this 70 minute documentary to see what a friend from the past contributed to this film (she did wonderful award winning animation at Colossal Pictures in the last century) and found the film to be a rich, rewarding experience that presents insights into the life of Irmi Selver. Irma was born into an affluent German Jewish family in 1906.

The film as you might guess is an uplifting personal story built around tragedy, survival and redemption. From family photos we know Irmi came from a family with German Expressionist paintings on the walls and impressive modern furniture. Prior to the rise of Hitler her life was quite comfortable. She was well educated and she had a successful marriage.

Then the film explores what happened. It isn't a heroic story of being in the underground or the tragic story of concentration camps. Instead it is the less familiar story, at least to me. It is the tragic story of escape from several countries, the loss of several people, severe mental depression and most importantly finding yourself and rebuilding your life.

There are dramatic moments including the escape from Germany and then a disastrous escape from Holland. There are other tragic moments including the loss of loved ones. While Irmi has moments of deep depression, what impressed me was her having the strength to rebuild her life, to find new purposes to her life, to help others and to create a new circle of family and friends.

This deeply personal documentary by her daughter is based on Irmi Selver's memoir. It is set for theatrical release on November 13. Locally there will be a virtual opening at the Roxie. It is also going to be shown at the Pacific Film Archive. It was shown locally as part of the Jewish Film Institute's Cinegogue Summer Days.

The film is a collaboration between Bay Area based filmmaker Veronica Selver and Susan Fanshal. Both Veronica & Susan have specialized in social issue documentaries and have strong ties to the Bay Area. They previously collaborated on *KPFA On Air*, exploring the history of the Berkeley based radio station. Veronica is based in the Bay Area and Susan is a graduate of UC Berkeley, was based in the Bay Area for many years and now resides in New York.

It Opens November 13

Roxie Virtual Cinema, San Francisco

<https://www.roxie.com/irmi/>





Marge champion on her 100 birthday

MARGE CHAMPION, ACTRESS, DANCER AND MODEL FOR SNOW WHITE, DIES AT 101 Marge's father was famed Hollywood dance and ballet teacher Ernest Belcher. He was friends with Walt Disney, and the all-male animation team working on *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) studied her movements on a soundstage in order to make their heroine move more realistically.

Starting at age 14, she performed for them one or two days a month (for \$10 a day) for two years." None of them had been a young girl or knew how a dress would do this or that or the other thing," she said in a 1998 interview with the Archive of American Television. "Most of the animators [before then] took their characters ... out of themselves."

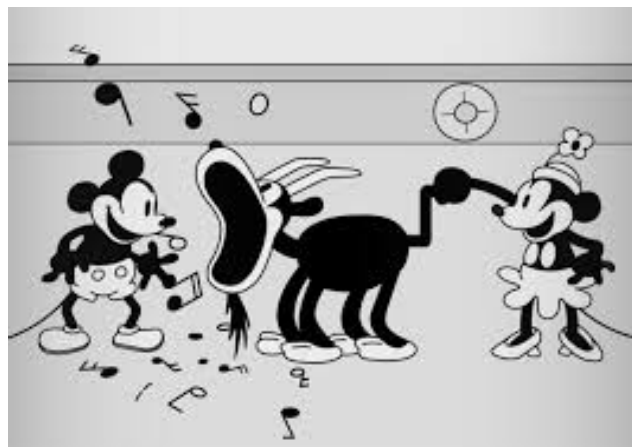
Marge even danced for them as the dwarf Dopey, she recalled. She also served as a Disney model for the Blue Fairy in *Pinocchio* (1940), for Hyacinth Hippo in *Fantasia* (1940) and for Mr. Stock in *Dumbo* (1941).

In 1936, she performed before large crowds with the Los Angeles Civic Opera and a year later married Art Babbitt, the Disney animator who created Goofy (she was 17 and he was 29; they divorced in 1940). She then played Snow White in a touring vaudeville act with The Three Stooges.

WATCH 100 SEQUENCES THAT SHAPED ANIMATION From Charles-Émile Reynaud and illusionist Georges Méliès to the South Park Kids and Spider Man. This is a fascinating collection of shorts and clips covering the evolution of the medium. It was put together by Vulture.com and went online in October 2020. <https://www.vulture.com/article/most-influential-best-scenes-animation-history.html>

DISNEYLAND AND OTHER THEME PARKS IN CALIF. ARE STILL CLOSED AND ARE FIGHTING WITH THE STATE TO REOPEN There are stringent guidelines from the state for reopening Disneyland and Universal Studios in Hollywood and they are in a bitter battle with California Gov. Gavin Newsom about reopening. After all the parks in Florida began their successful phased reopening over the summer.

State Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly introduced the guidelines during a press conference and the parks are considered a higher risk than outdoor stadiums that can now operate under Tier 4 "Yellow" (minimal) with a limited capacity of 25 percent. Orange County is currently in the "Red" (substantial) tier. Los Angeles County is at Tier 1 "Purple" (widespread). Once open, a reservation system will be required (no day-of ticket sales) and masks will be required at the theme parks. Parks smaller than Universal and Disneyland will not have as difficult a path to reopen since they are mostly outdoors.



LAST MINUTE NEWS

THE WALT DISNEY FAMILY MUSEUM IS REOPENING They are pleased to announce that The Walt Disney Family Museum plans to reopen to the public on Thursday, November 5, 2020 in accordance with the city's COVID 19 guidelines.

NEW HOURS: The museum will be open Thursday through Sunday from 10am to 5:30pm (with last gallery entry at 4:15pm) and will be closed Monday through Wednesday for the remainder of the year.

THEIR NEXT SPECIAL EXHIBITS They will be *The Walt Disney Studios and World War II* and *Veterans Voices: Painted Realities*. More information will be announced soon. 415.345.6800 | waltdisney.org

QUIBI, FOUNDED BY JEFFREY KATZENBERG AND MEG WHITMAN, FAILED TO FIND AN AUDIENCE SO THEY ARE CLOSING Founded about six months ago, they have announced they are shutting down and will return money to investors. They were a mobile streaming service that offered entertainment and news programs in five to ten minute segments that you could watch on your phone. It turned out people stuck inside their homes during the pandemic

were not interested in subscribing. They has raised \$1.75 billion in cash from investors. They failed to find a buyer for the company so they are returning the remaining money.

Jeffrey had been chairman of Disney during their second golden age, was pushed out and then created DreamWorks which he later sold. Meg was CEO of Hewlett Packard.

ASIFA-SF IS A VOLUNTEER RUN ASSOCIATION

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

ASIFA-SF is a chapter of: **Association Internationale du Film d'Animation** with almost 40 chapters around the world. Membership is \$26 a year with printed newsletter mailed to you or \$21 a year if you want the e-mailed version.

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