

Jump Cut

By George T. Marshall

(January 2007) Another year begins and with it much anticipation for the film industry in New England. Last year, 2006 was an eventful year with the region filled with stars, production crews and great hope. That hope continues to burn right that the plethora of projects undertaken were not just an aberration, but the footprints for something substantial and long-term. Only time will substantiate if that is true.

In looking back at 2006, I came to realize that a lot of ground was covered in this column. I was able to meet some amazingly talented individuals and I thought what better way to begin the New Year than to recap three of the interviews I undertook, and to pave the way for what are planned this year.

So, here they are in a "Back to the Future" sort of way:

Early in the summer I spoke with regional players of the **48 Hour Film Project**; a program that toured the country and docked both in Boston and Providence. Ironically, when the event took place in Rhode Island's capitol city, it saw its largest New England participation; something that came as quite a surprise to regional industry leaders.

Back in May 2001, DC filmmaker Mark Ruppert came up with a crazy idea to try to make a film in 48 hours. He quickly enlisted his filmmaking partner, Liz Langston, and several other DC filmmakers to form their own teams and join him in this experiment. The big question back then was: "Would films made in only 48 hours even be watchable?"

The answer was a resounding yes, and now 5 years later and with more than 66 competitions having taken place around the world, it is amazing to consider the success of the Project. This year marks the 5th time the Project visited Atlanta, Los Angeles, New York and Austin, and the 7th time for DC.

The smallest team has consisted of one person who sets up the camera then runs around to be "on-camera". Their largest team to date was an Atlanta-based team with 70 people. They've had about 2000 teams in the Project over the years, and at 15 people per team; that translates to roughly 30,000 people who have answered the call to come on out and make a movie.

THE NE FILMMAKERS/PARTICIPANTS INTERVIEWED

- **Ben Guaraldi, Boston Producer, 48 Hour Film Project**
- **Chad Carlberg, Creative Director/Founder, Bait & Tackle Ad Co.**
- **Joe LaRocca; Top Feeg, www.topfeeg.com**

GTM: What were the dynamics of working with different people you just met in undertaking this project?

Chad Carlberg: Once I had a list of participants, I sent them all a letter stating that 'this is not a democracy. What I say goes. You'll be assigned a role based on your abilities and our needs,' etc.

And then, over the next 48 hours, I learned how well democracy works.

Not only did everyone make a contribution, each person brought very useful and quite particular skills and resources. We were like the Superfriends, only with more wool than lycra.

Joe LaRocca: I only work with good friends because I don't feel like it is a weekend to be polite. I just like knowing the people before hand. For the same reason that I shoot, direct, and edit. It isn't that I am a control freak it just helps me keep everything organized which is very important when you only have 48 hours.

Ben Guaraldi: Mostly, I know my coworkers quite well, actually. My volunteers are my family and friends, and even many of the filmmakers I've gotten to know over the years.

I think for the filmmakers, it's challenging to work with anyone under such intense deadlines. It's really hard to make a film in 48 hours, and all of the folks working on it need to work as a team. It's difficult to do that with even your friends, and with strangers it's very hard. Some of the best films that have come out of the 48HFP have been because strangers worked together, though, so it can be very rewarding, too.

GTM: What advice would you give to other filmmakers about undertaking such a time-sensitive commitment?

Joe LaRocca: Just make sure you keep it simple. Aim for a 5 min movie, if it doesn't absolutely need to be in the film then cut it. Don't be serious, it almost never seems to work. Remember to have fun too. Because if you do have fun it shows up on film and the audience loves it, not that I pander to the audience but it makes the whole event more enjoyable when your film is well received. I was not having fun this year until Sunday when we started the new idea, despite the fact that it was looking like we weren't going to get it in on time. It was all because I realized that if you aren't having fun then your done. That goes with most things as well.

Chad Carlberg: It's totally worth the effort, but clear your schedule for the next week. You'll need some recovery time.

Ben Guaraldi: Oh, so much: Plan ahead. Check your equipment. Meet your crew before hand--have a drink; socialize. Have fun while making your movie

(the audience will be able to tell). Write a good script, and don't start shooting until you have one. Be nice to your teammates. Be bold: Make interesting and daring decisions. Be humble: This movie belongs to your entire team. Remember the audience: Your movie is first and foremost for them.

For more information about participating in the next 48 Hour Film Project, go to the Project's website at www.48hourfilm.com

...

In August, The Rhode Island International Film Festival was presented with a gift from the Walt Disney Animation Studio, a classically animated short called "The Little Matchgirl." The director of the work also did Disney's "The Lion King." His name is Roger Allers. I also spoke with Roger and Don Hahn, the film's producer.

GTM: The production on this short film began in 2000, why does it take so long to complete an animated film?

Roger Allers: The initial production took about a year including storyboarding animation, effects, and final color. For three years after completion, Michael Eisner had us trying different endings (none of which to my mind were satisfactory). This was done while I was directing a film at Sony, and so was done "long distance". At the end of three years, I was able to restore the original ending. We then added the credits, balanced the color and "voila!"- a 6 minute movie finished in five years!

Don Hahn: Matchgirl was made by many talented artists that were between projects so the tempo of production was slow and steady.

GTM: How is the look of an animated film determined? From the choice of color to the over feel of the piece?

Roger Allers: Sometimes an artist (a development artist, an art director, or the director) will do a piece and it will inspire everyone and it becomes the initiating guide for the look of a picture. Other times, there is much exploring of looks and styles before a look develops.

GTM: What makes an animated film a Disney film? What goes on to determine that it meets the criteria for the Disney brand?

Roger Allers: You could ask 50 people that question and perhaps get as many answers. For me personally, a Disney film is one that remembers all the age groups in the audience, neither trying to "talk down to" some, or "pander to the lowest common denominator", but respecting their intelligence, and seeking to delight and touch them.

Don Hahn: We don't think of a brand or a criteria when we make a film. But films with great story, great character and heart have always been associated with

Disney since the days of Snow White. Matchgirl is no different in its sincerity and depth of character.

GTM: What does it mean to direct an animated film? The actors are really only characters that are created by the artists. How does one “direct” animation?

Roger Allers: Its not really so different from live-action if you think of it this way. Take a recent movie- Mr and Mrs Smith- Mr John Smith was only a character, an idea (albeit a one-dimensional one). The director guided the writer, the actor (B. Pitt), the stunt double, the cinematographer, the editing, the dubbing session, etc., to make him come alive. In animation, the character's voice is the performance of one actor and the physical performance is created by the other "actor with a pencil"-the animator. Each performance is guided by the director as well as all the other functions: camera moves, editing, etc, that are present in live-action. We animation directors just never get to yell "Cut!"

Don Hahn: The actors are really only characters that are created by the artists. How does one “direct” animation? It's no different than directing theatre or live action. There is a story to be told and the director has to guide all the aspects of character, costume, set, effects, lighting and staging to the benefit of that story. The technique is different, but the director's job is still to create a compelling story on the screen.

GTM: Computer generated imagery is becoming so ubiquitous. What are the virtues of hand cell animation over computer work? What was hand drawn and what was computer generated in “The Little Match Girl?”

Roger Allers: For me, the virtue of traditional animation is the intimacy, the directness of the animator's gesture, his line, his touch. In The Little Match Girl, everything but the snowflakes was hand drawn. And even the large snowflakes at the beginning were hand painted and the designs transferred to the 3-D planes which turned and fell.

Don Hahn: The actors are really only characters that are created by the artists. How does one “direct” animation? It's no different than directing theatre or live action. There is a story to be told and the director has to guide all the aspects of character, costume, set, effects, lighting and staging to the benefit of that story. The technique is different, but the director's job is still to create a compelling story on the screen.

•••

Finally, I interviewed Jonathan Newman, a Brandeis University graduate who now makes his living in Great Britain as a film director. His most recent effort was “Foster” that had its US premiere in 2006.

GTM: Tell our readers a bit about yourself. When did you first become interested in film? What is your educational background and where you came from plus the

professional journey you've taken?

Jonathan Newman: My parents decided to move from London to Los Angeles when I was five. I think this played an enormous part in shaping my interest in film. We lived in an idyllic setting on a cliff overlooking a nude beach in Malibu. I have early memories of throwing cherry tomatoes down on to the nude sunbathers below... oh the shame...

It was during these 8 years in LA that I got an early taste of film. The TV shows Knight Rider and TK Hooker were both filmed at our house. The film set seemed like a big playground for adults, with the cameras, lights, costumes and sets all being expensive toys. I was hooked.

We moved back to London when I was 12 and I finished the remainder of high school. When I was 18 I went off to Brandeis University in Boston to embark on my undergraduate studies.

Brandeis has something of a creative history - former alums include "Friends" creators Marta Kaufmann and David Crane, and "Will & Grace" actress "Debra Messing". Despite being an excellent academic institution, there was a lot of creative stimulation. I was active in theatre, both acting and directing in various productions. Most notably, I played Mr. Pink in a stage version of "Reservoir Dogs" and directed a stage version of Hitchcock's "ROPE." I also began shooting short films on video and also commercials for local businesses. While at Brandeis I designed an independent concentration in Film Theory - the first major of its kind at the school, which led to the creation of a Film major program due to the overwhelming demand for academic film studies. My mentor in the program, Professor Thomas Doherty, was instrumental in providing the foundation of academic program/ and for the core group of us, about 12 students passionate about film, this became somewhat of a benchmark year...we were the "Breakfast Club!"

I headed back to London and immediately enrolled in a masters program in film production at the Northern School of Film in Leeds - well known for its practical course. I made an appalling short film, but at least I shot on film for the first time. You have to make mistakes in order to grow. I finished school and decided to call myself a "director" (perhaps naively). I've been one ever since! Like most freelancers, I love it and hate it. Being on set is exhilarating. Chasing the dangling carrot, which just always seems out of reach is unsettling.

GTM: How did you land your first job in the industry?

Jonathan Newman: My first job, really, was at the age of five, when I acted with Steve Martin in an after school special! My scene got cut - hence the harsh reality of show business and rejection sunk in at an early age.

So, not counting that, my lucky break was really due to making the right phone call at the right time. I called a British Telecom and asked them for £10,000.

[Footnote: that's \$17,635.00 US] I got it. With that money I shot my first feature, "Being Considered."

I have a theory about success. It's a triangle. On two sides are the fixed variables, a) luck and b) experience/talent. You have as much luck and experience as you have at any given time. On the base of that triangle is c) action, which is the only thing you have control over. So, when you apply constant action in the face of adversity, barriers and obstacles, your chances of being lucky increase, as does your experience. The more you apply action, the greater chance you have of reaching the pinnacle of that triangle, success. I feel you can apply this to any aspect of your life. Sorry for digressing.

GTM: Working in England is not exactly being in Los Angeles or New York. What limitations--if any--have you discovered and assets from not being in the so-called US heartland making movies?

Jonathan Newman: Working in England does have its drawbacks. Financing has always been an issue in this country. Not as many films are made therefore it's harder to get them up and running the first place. There's a lot of talent in this country that doesn't get the recognition they deserve for whatever reason, lack of opportunity, lack of finance. Ambition is frowned upon in England, whereas in the States it is embraced. LA is, without question, the heartland of filmmaking, and there are far more opportunities that present themselves. Ultimately, I do see myself making films in LA. I've had some interest but I'm waiting for the right project and moment.

GTM: What would you tell an independent filmmaker just starting in the business they should expect and prepare themselves for in making their first feature or short? Can you give examples?

Jonathan Newman: I'd tell them to go to law school.

Filmmaking is not for those that want a stable life and a stable income. It's a fiercely competitive hand to mouth lifestyle. Every time you finish a job you are essentially unemployed again until the next one gets financed. You have to be committed and aware of the lifestyle. If you truly are committed to making films, then I would suggest the following:

1. Development is key. You MUST work on your script as much as you can and more. Get people to read it, listen to criticism (especially negative!), and be open to making the best possible script.

2. Be Proactive. Don't wait for other people to make it happen for you. Make it happen for yourself. 3. Choose your battles. Not all minor points are worth fighting for when you have a war to win.

4. Leave your ego behind. Filmmaking is collaborative. Even Olympic gold medalists need a coach sometimes. And we all have blind spots. Powerful

people are powerful because they allow other people to contribute to them.

5. Be original in your story telling, not derivative. Take risks.

6. Try to shoot on the best possible medium you can – that means film first, the HiDef, then, at the very worst scenario, miniDV.

7. Be prepared for rejection and lots of it. Then, if the rejection doesn't kill you, it will be the hope that destroys you! The occasional positive phone call or email that keeps you going. Seeing your peers succeed when you still have a mountain to climb. It's hope that really destroys you and also motivates you.

About the Author:

George T. Marshall is the Producing Director of the Rhode Island-based Flickers Arts Collaborative, the creators of the annual Rhode Island International Film Festival for which he also serves as Executive Director. He teaches film and communications at Rhode Island College and speech communications and documentary filmmaking at Roger Williams University. He is a director, writer, producer of commercials and industrials for numerous business clients in the region. He can be reached at <flicksart@aol.com>