

TAKE ONE

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Phone: (416) 289-7123; Fax: (416) 289-7375
Email: arc@shaw.wave.ca

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Mailing address

P.O. Box 151, 2255B Queen Street East, Toronto, ON, Canada M4E 1G3

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Phone: (416) 535-5244; Fax: (416) 535-2277

Email: takeone@interlog.com

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It's been two years since *Take One* dedicated its first issue to animation. At that time, we rather cheekily asserted that "Canadian Animation Rules!" Although "rules" has already become a dated expression, we'll stand behind the sentiment. Canadian animators are still in the forefront not only of classical animation but in the extremely important realm of computer-generated imagery (CGI). Canada supports not only the National Film Board, one of the last bastions of *auteur* animation, but also provides a home and starting base for such leading-edge computer companies as Softimage and Alias/Wavefront. Sheridan College (most famously) and other less-lauded learning institutions offer highly regarded courses in both forms of animation, leading to a multitude of jobs here and abroad for Canadian graduates. With animation studios such as Nelvana, Cinar and Mainframe as major players, a wide range of animated television series are coproduced here with partners in France, Japan, the United States, England and other nations. And, being Canadian, we do it all with no fuss and virtually no acclaim.

Peter Goddard bursts that particular bubble with his piece on CGI and Steve "Spaz" Williams. Although Williams isn't the household name he ought to be, he certainly knows the score and is willing to take on Lucas and Spielberg in his rise to the top of the heap. Goddard points out that CGI could easily end up being as important to filmmaking as the coming of sound. With "vactors" replacing actors and special effects already the dominant factor in blockbuster films, the era of CGI is on the verge of coming into its own.

Meanwhile, what about animation itself? Two years ago, I expressed concern about the decline of personal filmmaking in animation. From the late 1950s to the early 1990s, a number of animators were able to produce work of remarkable quality with virtually no commercial restraints. Sponsored by governments in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the U.S.S.R., Jiri Trnka, Dusan Vukotic, Alexander Petrov, Karel Zeman and others made wonderfully artistic work. Parables about peace, ruminations about sexuality and sardonic looks at alienation were the topics of the day. Experimentation and personal expression were endorsed provided the artists didn't rock the boat and condemn the society they were representing at international festivals.

Now that type of filmmaking is no longer lavishly supported by national institutions and, of course, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the U.S.S.R. "rule" nothing anymore. In Canada, the NFB used to follow the model of state-sponsored animation, producing work not only by Canadians but also by artists like Bretislav Pojar and Zlatko Grgic, who came from those then-communist states. And, of course, our films, the Film Board films, won international prizes too.

While the communist system that produced many of those films was undoubtedly corrupt, it's fair to say that many of us who saw, and continue to see, animated films on the festival circuit miss their innocence and fine aesthetic qualities. Precious few of films get made today. What is heartening is the realization that more such works are starting to be produced again, under vastly different circumstances. Chris Landreth, profiled in this issue by Cynthia Amsden, is a case in point. A computer whiz kid, Landreth uses his position at Alias/Wavefront to test that company's latest software through the creation of art films like *the end* and *Bingo*. Adam Shaheen, the guru at Cuppa Coffee (and also written about in this edition), prides himself on hiring freelancers who want to make personal films in their spare time.

What does all this say? It suggests that a dynamic industry that is employing thousands of people in this country alone can allow animation artists to pursue their dream projects. Although capitalism has its own set of problems, if animators can still make their own films, even with small budgets and expanded working hours, then the system here might claim "victory." We'll see.

Marc Glassman, Guest Editor