



## PRODUCTION NOTES

DIRECTOR: HILLARY BRADFIELD

PRODUCTION MANAGER: JENNIFER NEWFIELD

MUSIC: JAKE MONACO

### SYNOPSIS

Bianca, a young ballet student, loves to dance but has doubts and insecurities about her body and performance. As she struggles to gain confidence, she confronts the “monster in the mirror,” and literally shatters the constraints that are holding her back from giving a glittering performance. Dazzling lighting and effects combine with choreographed animation to give this short its heart, humor and triumphant grand jete finale.

### ABOUT THE FILM

“Reflect” is the first in the expanded season 2 selection of “Short Circuit” experimental films from Walt Disney Animation Studios, presented exclusively on Disney+. This latest offering comes from director Hillary Bradfield, who has been a storyboard artist (“Frozen 2,” “Encanto”) at Disney since 2017.

In creating the story for “Reflect,” Bradfield wanted to examine the emotional struggle of a young girl (Bianca) who has doubts and negative thoughts about her body, and her journey to overcome them. In class, Bianca has to face the mirror and her own reflection, which serves as the antagonist of the story. As she begins dancing, she starts thinking negatively about her body, and this leads her into a dream space where the cracking and fracturing mirror becomes a monster that embodies her self-directed negativity. As she takes a deep breath, executes a perfect pirouette, and sticks the landing, the intimidating mirror spikes explode into bursts of glitter, and Bianca is back in the classroom exuding a new confidence.

Bradfield drew upon her childhood experiences as a competitive figure skater, and her observations about body positivity in telling this story. “I just want people to feel good about themselves when they watch ‘Reflect,’” explains Bradfield. “There’s a lot of

negative noise out there about what you're supposed to look like especially in a performing art or sport. It's hard not to put that on yourself. Bianca's journey is about accepting herself."

"Reflections can be scary, and in Bianca's case, everything starts compacting in on her and she's in the belly of the beast," adds Bradfield. "She dances through her fears, and takes on the thing she is most afraid of. In the end, she can look at herself in the mirror, which she couldn't do before, and love herself."

"The thing I love about the Short Circuit program is that it provides a space where you can come up with ideas that are best served within a short film, and then you can go and do it. It can be just purely about creativity and trying something new. It's about experimentation and seeing if you can make something unique."

Heather Blodget, manager of the Short Circuit program (and one of the reference choreographers for "Reflect" along with Ryan J. Garcia Buenviaje), observes, "The program is about creating new opportunities to tell stories, and those ideas can come from anywhere within Walt Disney Animation Studios. It's a creative and experimental sandbox, not only to push our storytelling further, but to experiment with different production processes and workflows, and to let people stretch out of their comfort zones and try new roles."

In his role as "Short Circuit Advisor" on "Reflect," veteran Disney Animation director of cinematography - lighting, Brian Leach, whose impressive list of credits over 19 years at the Studio include top roles on "Ralph Breaks the Internet" and "Zootopia," proved to be a driving force for the film. According to Bradfield, "'Reflect' is all about reflections and we were so lucky to have Brian helping us every step of the way. I couldn't even think about doing the beat board for the short without him. He started doing tests early on to see how many waves we would need for some reflections. The film is essentially about a character surrounded by mirrors in the dark. When you take a character and surround her with reflective surfaces, it can be chaos with even just one light source."

Bradfield initially helped to visualize the film by taking a cardboard box, and using sticky mirror paper from a local craft store to create her own set or "spike room." She would then take pictures and videos on her cell phone to attempt to figure out the action and draw the storyboards. She also drew inspiration from classic films and cult favorites with famous mirror scenes such as "The Lady from Shanghai," "Enter the Dragon," and "The Neon Demon."

With regard to the ballet moves and dancing authenticity, "Reflect" had the good fortune of having an in-house expert. Heather Blodget had been dancing since the age of three, and had been a semi-professional dancer growing up on the Central Coast of California. At USC, she started the chamber ballet company. She immediately sparked to Hillary's vision and offered to record some dance moves for reference.

“Hillary had an awareness of wanting to make sure the animation was mostly accurate to ballet technique,” explains Blodget. “She also talked us through Bianca’s emotional journey and how she wanted to start from a place that captured her joy and love of dancing. The pure happiness that she feels when she’s dancing and not being self-conscious. Ryan and I served as reference choreographers, working from home over Zoom. It was a little challenging trying to film ourselves in our respective living rooms. We were constantly running into the logistical issues of wanting to show our moves, but not being able to get far enough back to film the performance.”

The music for “Reflect” was composed by Jake Monaco, who had previously worked on the Short Circuit films, “Going Home” and “Crosswalk.” He has composed for numerous animated projects including the upcoming Disney+ series “Cars on the Road,” and wrote the score for such features as “Jerry and Marge Go Large” and “Absolutely Fabulous: The Movie.”

“Jake gave us a rough pass at the music early on which we used for layout and storyboarding purposes,” recalls Bradfield. “We talked to him about how important it was to dance to have the tempo and rhythm anchor the animation. When Bianca is feeling insecure and sees parts of her body that she’s not feeling good about, she stops dancing and is in this negative space where the rhythm goes away. When she stops focusing on the negativity and starts dancing again, the rhythm returns. Jake was a great collaborator and gave us exactly what we needed.”

### ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Hillary Bradfield has been at Walt Disney Animation Studios since 2017, and began her association with the Studio as a storyboard apprentice. Her feature credits include “Frozen 2” and “Encanto.” Currently, she is working on the Disney+ original series, “Iwájú.”

Born in Anaheim, California, and raised in San Pedro, Hillary was a competitive figure skater as a child (she designed her own costumes which her grandmother would then sew), and took part in exercises like ballet and Pilates to cross train.

Drawing came naturally, and she began creating sketchbooks in which she drew characters and scenes from movies and VHS covers. Drawing classes in junior college proved to be a revelation, and she proclaimed that this was something she should be doing. She continued along that path at San Jose State University with a goal of working in animation or a related role in the art profession. She was particularly drawn to storyboarding, which appealed to her because it allowed her to essentially make her own movies (since it involved elements of animation, design, and staging).

Hillary landed her first industry job in 2012 working on “SpongeBob SquarePants” as a production intern. She returned to school after that and graduated in 2013. This led to subsequent revisionist and storyboarding assignments on “Randy Cunningham:

9th Grade Ninja,” “Dawn of the Croods,” “Penn Zero: Part-Time Hero” (Disney XD) and “Rapunzel’s Tangled Adventure” (Disney Channel). She returned to DreamWorks as an episodic director on the TV show, “Harvey Girls Forever!”

### ABOUT SHORT CIRCUIT EXPERIMENTAL FILMS

“Short Circuit” experimental films debuted exclusively on Disney+ in 2020 with fourteen short films, the ideas for which had been pitched and then created by various employees from across Walt Disney Animation Studios. Another five titles comprised the second season the following year.

The goal of the Short Circuit program is to take risks in both visual style and story, surface new voices at the Studio and experiment with new technical innovation in the filmmaking process. Drawing on the support of the Studio and their fellow artists, each director has a set time and budget to create their personal vision for the film.

According to production manager, Jennifer Newfield, “The top priority in selecting a pitch is the storytelling aspects. We’re looking for something that is feasible within a short 90-second timeframe but that also tells something of a deeper understanding, is a good story, is something new and interesting, or alternatively, something very experimental that we haven’t explored before at the Studio.

She adds, “The beauty of Short Circuit is that the program is outside the paradigm of the regular creative development process. Clark Spencer (president of Walt Disney Animation Studios) and Jennifer Lee (Chief Creative Officer) are very supportive of the program because they love the innovation that comes out of it. There are some great talents who have risen to new heights as a result of this program, and that is really, really rewarding to be sure.”