

WALT DISNEY ANIMATION STUDIOS

SHORTCIRCUIT

EXPERIMENTAL FILMS

PRODUCTION NOTES

Short Circuit, Walt Disney Animation Studios' innovative and experimental short film program where anyone at the Studio can pitch an idea and potentially be selected to create their own short, marks the fifth anniversary of the program's inception, with the debut of five new shorts exclusively on Disney+ on August 4, 2021. This new selection of short films by a group of filmmakers hailing from various departments throughout Disney Animation, explores five unique visual and storytelling styles. The first group of fourteen Short Circuit Experimental Films debuted on Disney+ in January 2020.

The goal of the Short Circuit program is to take risks in both visual style and story, surface new voices at Disney Animation 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. The five shorts featured in this season of Short Circuit are "Crosswalk" directed by Ryan Green, "Dinosaur Barbarian" directed by Kim Hazel, "Going Home" directed by Jacob Frey, "No. 2 to Kettering" directed by Liza Rhea, and "Songs to Sing in the Dark" directed by Riannon Delanoy.

Commenting on this latest group of short films in the Short Circuit program, Jennifer Lee, chief creative officer for Walt Disney Animation Studios said, "We are so excited to be premiering these five new Short Circuit films on Disney+ and feel that this is a great way to share these entertaining, unique, and often personal stories with the widest possible audience. The program is open to everyone within Disney Animation, and the projects are selected based on their merits and without knowing who is making the pitch. There has been such great enthusiasm and excitement for the program, and it has allowed us to boldly experiment with new technology and techniques, give opportunities to aspiring directors, and to tell unique stories."

Overseeing this latest group of films is production manager Jennifer Newfield, who had worked closely with the filmmakers from perfecting their pitches through the various phases of pre- and post-production. She served in a similar role on many of the previous Short Circuit films from the first group, working alongside then-production manager Nicholas Russell.

"The selection group for the Short Circuit program is usually comprised of as many as ten filmmakers and creative development folks from throughout Disney Animation," explains Newfield. "This group can also include technical and visual effects supervisors, and previous Short Circuit directors. Their top priority in selecting a pitch is the storytelling aspects. They're looking for something that is a good story that works within a (roughly) 90-second timeframe, something new and interesting, and something that we haven't explored before at the Studio. In this latest group, 'Songs to Sing in the Dark' is a really good example. Director Riannon Delanoy is an animator who wanted to visualize an auditory experience with a really interesting

experimental aspect – because her film doesn't specifically have a beginning, middle and end type of story.”

Once a pitch has been selected, Newfield quickly matches the director with a Short Circuit advisor. “People step forward to express interest in each project, which is wonderful. We go around to the various departments doing roadshows and letting everyone know what the shorts are about. Then we ask if anyone would like to participate as an advisor, a guide, and/or a mentor within their department.

“The beauty of Short Circuit is that the program is outside the paradigm of the regular creative development process,” adds Newfield. “It’s freeing for the directors and doesn’t necessarily follow the typical Studio process for making a film. Clark Spencer (president of Walt Disney Animation Studios) and Jennifer Lee 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 rewarding to be sure.”

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION MANAGER:

Jennifer Newfield first came to Walt Disney Animation Studios in 2008 to work as a production assistant on the feature, “The Princess and the Frog.” Over the next five years, she worked in similar roles on “Tangled” and the TV animated special, “Prep & Landing: Naughty vs. Nice” before moving on to an assignment at Screen Novelties on a stop-motion television special for “SpongeBob Squarepants.” This was followed by a stint as production manager on the 2015 Charlie Kaufman directed stop-motion feature, “Anomalisa.”

Born and raised in Corona del Mar, Calif., Jennifer developed a passion for stop-motion animation and puppetry at an early age, and counted the work of the Jim Henson Company as being a major influence. She pursued her interests in theater at UCLA, where she received her BA in Theater Directing and Stage Management. This was followed by production assistant assignments on several reality TV productions including “Deal or No Deal” and “American Gladiators.” Around that same time, she also worked on the management side at The Geffen Playhouse in Westwood.

She returned to Disney Animation in 2015 to work as a production supervisor on feature films and other animated projects. Jennifer recently began work on the new Disney+ long-form animated series, “Iwájú” (steeped in science fiction, this first-of-its-kind collaboration for Disney Animation with the Pan-African comic book entertainment company Kugali is set to debut in 2022). She lives with her husband, Nicholas Wenger, a film and TV editor on various shows for Amazon and Hulu.

SHORT CIRCUIT EXPERIMENTAL FILMS SEASON 2:

CROSSWALK

DIRECTOR: RYAN GREEN

SYNOPSIS:

A law-abiding citizen must find his inner strength to cross the street at a light that won't change.

ABOUT THE FILM:

You never know where or when inspiration will strike. For veteran Disney Animation story artist Ryan Green it came while he was waiting to cross the street that separates Walt Disney Animation Studios from The Walt Disney Studios main lot in Burbank, Calif. As he stared at the annoying "Don't Walk" sign, and gazed for miles down the empty street, he began thinking of the trade-offs between personal freedom and social living. And, being a story artist with an active imagination, this led to thoughts about being a biological survival machine that has evolved over 3.8 billion years, and what his ancestors that risked their lives to cross the Atlantic Ocean would think about him standing there waiting for the light to change. From this "dichotomy of thought," the pitch for "Crosswalk" was born. When he got the "green light" to make the movie, his editor actually went down to the very crosswalk where it all began, to tape the beeping sounds of the light itself.

According to Ryan, "I wanted the film to have this evolutionary concept and we decided to package that information as a backstory intro. This allowed us to get the audience on board with the subtext up front, and set up the framing before we see the more surface-level 'man versus machine' conflict. It also allowed us to try different styles of animation in the film. The opening, which I animated myself, is very much 2D, while the rest of the film has kind of a stop-motion feel with a clay character and lots of texture. I wanted the film to have an editorial cartoon quality, but in CG, and that led to the idea of having this miniature, exaggerated set where all of the elements point back to our character's struggle. Most importantly, I wanted the audience to have fun with this satirical look at social living versus freedom.

"Working on this Short Circuit film was a great experience," adds Ryan. "I've always worked within the constraints of someone else's vision, and this presented a whole new experience. And even though it's a very light-hearted piece, I did some deep soul searching. Why did I really resonate with this topic? Why was it important to me? And what was the exact theme I was trying to get across? had to make all those final decisions that I never had to make before."

As for the Short Circuit program itself, Ryan notes, "I love the program and the fact that the shorts are chosen in a blind submission process. No matter what your position within the Studio, no matter who you are, you are judged solely on your idea. I also love that we're able to take risks stylistically, and try things technologically that aren't typically done."

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR:

Ryan Green began at Disneytoon Studios in 2010 before coming to Walt Disney Animation Studios three years later as a story artist. In that capacity, he worked on "Moana" and "Frozen," and contributed as additional story artist on "Ralph Breaks the Internet," the Oscar®-winning film, "Zootopia," and Disney Animation's recent 2021 release, "Raya and the Last Dragon."

Originally from Williamsport, Penn., Ryan attended Pennsylvania State University, where he earned a BS degree in Biology: Vertebrate Physiology before attending Columbus College of Art & Design, where he earned a BFA in Time-Based Media Studies: Animation. He was drawn to Disney Animation by a desire to be part of the studio legacy that helped develop his imagination as a child through such films as “Alice in Wonderland,” “Robin Hood” and “Pete’s Dragon,” and to learn by working alongside the studio’s legendary artists.

Ryan currently resides in Burbank, Calif., with his wife, fellow Disney Animation artist Fawn Veerasunthorn (Head of Story on “Raya and the Last Dragon”) and their daughter, Kina, who was born during the production of “Moana.”

DINOSAUR BARBARIAN

DIRECTOR: KIM HAZEL

SYNOPSIS:

Battling evil is all in a day’s work for Dinosaur Barbarian, but what about taking out the trash? Sometimes even a superhero needs to clean up his act.

ABOUT THE FILM:

A shared joke with some friends over lunch at work, a love for cartoon superhero animated TV shows from the ‘80s and their theme songs, and a passion for dinosaurs all came together for animator Kim Hazel in developing her short film, “Dinosaur Barbarian.”

“I’m a child of the ‘80s and I grew up loving cartoons,” recalls Kim. “But you only ever see the superheroes from those shows being heroic. I started thinking about how they handled everything else in their lives and their work-life balance. Do they ever stop and eat a meal or do anything else that normal people do? It seemed like the perfect story to tell in 90 seconds, and telling it through the framework of a theme song for an imaginary show seemed like a great pitch for the Short Circuit program.

“When you think of cartoons from the ‘80s, most people tend to think of the theme songs where they’re always doing heroic things,” she adds. “I thought the easiest way to subvert that trope and have some fun with it was through the song. I have always been a big fan of humor that sets up expectations and then does something the opposite of that. When they told me that my short film had been accepted, I was in disbelief. I remember feeling like Anne Hathaway in ‘The Princess Diaries’ when she found out she’s a princess.”

Kim had written a few lyrics for the theme song which went along with her original pitch. She subsequently wrote out what she called her “poem” (a rough first pass of what she wanted the song to be) that laid out the story structure for the short. After reviewing several options for composers brought to her by the music department at Disney Animation, she chose Mondo Boys, two guys named Mike who had written scores mostly for horror films (and the Short Circuit film, “The Race”). They ended up writing the score and providing lyrics for the song, along with Kim who also landed a lyricist credit.

In keeping with the style of animated TV shows from the ‘80s, Kim decided on hand-drawn 2D animation, and enlisted guidance from legendary animator Mark Henn (who drew such Disney Animation favorites as Belle, Jasmine, Ariel, Tiana and Young Simba) and the talents of such 2D animation veterans as Alex Kuperschmidt and Randy Haycock, as well as several CG

animators who wanted to try their hand in that style. “Dinosaur Barbarian” is in fact the first Short Circuit film to be fully animated by hand.

“The joy of directing a film for Short Circuit is getting to interact and collaborate with so many great people, and to step outside your comfort zone and try something new and different. It inspired me to try out for the role of animation supervisor on Disney Animation’s 2022 feature film, and that’s what I’ll be doing next.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR:

Kim Hazel started with Walt Disney Animation Studios in 2013 as an animation trainee. From there, she went on to work as an animator on such films as “Frozen 2,” “Ralph Breaks the Internet,” the Oscar®-winning films, “Big Hero 6” and “Zootopia,” and the most recent Disney Animation release, “Raya and the Last Dragon.” She has also animated characters for the shorts, “Feast” and “Olaf’s Frozen Adventure,” as well as for the “Frozen Ever After” attraction at Walt Disney World Resort. Her next assignment is animation supervisor on Disney Animation’s unannounced 2022 feature.

Originally from San Pedro, Calif., Kim attended Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Fla., where she earned a BFA in Computer Animation. Her desire to help create meaningful stories that leave positive impressions on the world led her to Disney Animation, where she is honored to work alongside some of the people who brought to life characters she loved as a child. Kim currently resides in Valley Glen, Calif., with her husband and their menagerie of animals.

GOING HOME

DIRECTOR: JACOB FREY

SYNOPSIS:

A story about growing up and the meaning of home in which a young adult repeatedly visits his hometown, but with every new arrival starts to face the inevitable: change.

ABOUT THE FILM:

For his film, “Going Home,” director Jacob Frey tapped into his personal feelings about family, aging, and the fear of losing loved ones. Originally from Hilden, Germany (a small town near the Rhine River), Jacob started to think about his increasingly fewer trips back home to visit his parents, and the changes that he would notice between visits.

“For me, going home is a big deal because it always involves a huge step in time between visits,” observes Jacob. “And I started to feel like the older I got, the more I thought about my parents someday not being there, and the possibility that I could actually lose them. It’s a huge personal fear that I’m sure I share with a lot of people. The other thing that surprised me when I went home was how a familiar environment could seem so different and changed. When I would exit at the bus stop or the train station, and start exploring the city, I would find that things had changed and, all of a sudden, a familiar place started to feel like something strange to me.

“More and more, I began to see my parents change from being young and agile to becoming more fragile. Those visits became very precious to me.”

Opting for a stylized, graphical and flat look in 3D computer animation, Jacob and his small team of filmmakers set out to create a world that was constantly changing seasons to help tell the story. The character doesn't age throughout the film as the changes happen around him to illustrate the illusion of time standing still until the sudden realization that time has passed.

Keeping the environments constantly shifting in time presented some unique challenges for the artists involved, especially for the layout, crowds and lighting teams. An entire rack of clothing was created to appropriately dress the main character, and a lot of planning went into each of the rapidly changing shots. Jacob credits Alex Cazals in lighting as being a key player and tremendous help to him throughout the project.

"I'm so proud that we were able to take this big complex concept, and make it a smooth and satisfying experience for everyone who worked on it," adds Jacob. "When the project was first announced, I met with 30 co-workers who reached out to me to talk about their experiences of going home and how they perceived this subject. There were a lot of really touching and sincere conversations that I am super thankful for."

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR:

Jacob Frey began his career with Walt Disney Animation Studios in 2014 as an animation trainee, before becoming an assistant animator on the Oscar®-winning film, "Zootopia." He then went on to work as an animator on "Moana," "Ralph Breaks the Internet," "Frozen 2," and "Raya and the Last Dragon." Jacob is also credited as an animator of two previous Short Circuit films, "Cycles" and "Puddles," which debuted on Disney+ in January 2020. Currently, he is on assignment in a supervisory role as head of characters for all Disney Animation films, focusing on ways to improve workflow efficiency.

Born in Hilden, Germany, Jacob was initially interested in pursuing a career in graphic design but changed his path to animation after seeing Pixar Animation Studios' "Finding Nemo." He attended Filmakademie Baden-Wuerttemberg in Ludwigsburg, where he directed multiple animated short films including the viral hit, "The Present." His work has garnered more than 100 awards from various international film festivals. He currently resides in Los Angeles, Calif.

NO. 2 TO KETTERING

DIRECTOR: LIZA RHEA

SYNOPSIS:

On a dreary, ordinary morning, a girl learns how the power of laughter can lift even the most sullen among her fellow bus riders along their journey to Kettering.

ABOUT THE FILM:

The idea for "No. 2 to Kettering" sprang from actual life experience for director Liza Rhea, a modeler who has worked in the animation industry for the past 11 years.

She explains, "I'm a firm believer that we are all connected – no man (or woman) is an island – and no action goes without consequence, good or bad, not only for you but for those around you. As a child growing up in Northampton, England, each day I had to take a public bus to school, full of strangers, adult and child alike. A lot of the time, these people looked worn down with the weight of the world, but I would notice some who would smile and brighten up my

journey. As each day passed, and each bus came and went, I began to feel like it was my obligation to try and offer what little joy I could bring to my fellow passengers, and would smile at people I didn't know just to try and bring them some joy on their daily commute. After all, if our actions affect each other, why not make the ones that can spread warmth and joy? A smile is free, after all."

With that philosophy in mind, Liza set out to make her film, and collaborated with a team that included veteran effects animator Dale Mayeda ("Moana," "Frozen 2") as a key advisor. For the style of the film, she wanted something that had almost a stop-motion look to it to give the audience a sense of things being relatable and tangible in the 3D space. She was determined to use color to tell her story and as a tool to portray the emotion. She explains, "Whenever the main character would interact with a passenger and smile at them and they wouldn't return her smile, they would drain her color. She is typically so vibrant and full of bright colors. It just clicked with me that using color would be an interesting way to express her emotions without too much dialogue or over-explaining things.

"Everybody who worked on 'No. 2 to Kettering' blew my mind," Liza continues. "One of the great things about directing this film was working with all the various departments in the pipeline and seeing who handled what. I'm so proud of the team of artists that I was able to work with. They were just a dream, and they helped me make something better than I could have hoped.

"I hope the audience's takeaway is that joy is infectious. Really, that's the whole message. If it just resonates with one person, and that person smiles at another person, there may be a domino effect, and that could be a great thing."

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR:

Liza Rhea joined Walt Disney Animation Studios in 2017 as an Environmental Modeling apprentice on "Ralph Breaks the Internet," and has gone on to help model environments for "Frozen 2," "Raya and the Last Dragon," and Disney Animation's upcoming 2021 release, "Encanto." Born and raised in Northampton, England, she studied design at the Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts (LIPA), and went on to get an MFA degree at the UCLA Animation Workshop. Launching her professional career in the world of theatre as a set designer, she transitioned into animation in 2009, with the desire to build even bigger, more fantastical sets. Prior to coming to Disney, Liza worked as an Environmental Modeler at DreamWorks Animation Television on such shows as "Voltron," "Puss in Boots," and "Spirit." She currently lives in Glendale, Calif., with her husband, Michael (an animation writer), their daughter, Eleanor, and two cats – Sadie and Molly.

SONGS TO SING IN THE DARK

DIRECTOR: RIANNON DELANOY

SYNOPSIS:

Two creatures living in the depths of a dark cave engage in a battle of acoustic one-upmanship. As things escalate, they come to realize that they are stronger together.

ABOUT THE FILM:

For animator Riannon Delanoy, the Short Circuit program provided an opportunity to explore a more experimental form of filmmaking, bringing together her interests in biology, music and

movement. She cites “Fantasia” (and particularly “Night on Bald Mountain”) as being a big influence on her story and sensibilities. The daughter of two scientists, she came up with the idea for “Songs to Sing in the Dark” after exploring some notions she had about evolutionary biology, sound holograms, cymatics, and echolocation.

According to Riannon, “This short combines a lot of my different interests including the natural world and monsters, along with big expressive visuals. It also seemed like a natural fit for music because it has so much to do with sound. I started to think about what sound is: It’s a bubble and it has a shape. As you travel through a room, you get the sense of how sound behaves in three dimensions. With this film, I wanted to put a new spin on it by setting it in a completely dark world with a runaway evolutionary pathway, where sound is not just echolocation and navigation. It is also armor, and camouflage, and colorful threat displays.”

“Songs to Sing in the Dark” tells the story of two creatures – a little red one who starts out being afraid of everybody and a playful blue one who wants to be friends. When the red creature realizes that the other is not going to hurt him, they start to play, and music emerges from noise. They discover that they are stronger together as they team up to face bullies and predators in their wild environment. Life is better with a friend by your side and a song in your heart.

Riannon teamed up with Benjamin Robinson (Assistant Music Editor, “Raya and the Last Dragon,” “Frozen 2”) to create the film’s elaborate soundscape, sound effects, and score. She also served as the film’s composer with Benjamin providing arrangements.

On the animation side, veteran Disney animator Bert Klein proved to be a standout collaborator and craftsman, providing a good portion of the 2D animation. Rachel Bibb, a longtime clean-up animator at Disney, contributed her expertise as well. Dan Lund served as effects supervisor, overseeing many 2D holograms including the spectacular red-blue spiral in the middle of the short. Olun Riley was the lead lighter, and was instrumental in shepherding the film’s final look. Animation legend Eric Goldberg offered creative consultation on the film and designed some of the sound holograms. Executive producer Nicholas Russell encouraged Riannon to overcome the complexity of the idea for the film, and to try her hand as director.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR:

Born in Charlottesville, Va., and raised mostly in Stow and Acton, Mass., Riannon attended Rochester Institute of Technology, where she majored in Film and Animation. At the age of 12, she was so impressed with the Miyazaki film, “Princess Mononoke,” that she knew from then on she wanted to be involved in animation. She launched her professional career at Rhythm & Hues (a Los Angeles-based special effects studio) and also did a stint at Blue Sky Studios where she worked on such films as “Ice Age 4” before coming to Walt Disney Animation Studios in 2012 as part of the Talent Development program. Her Disney Animation film credits include “Frozen,” “Big Hero 6,” “Zootopia,” “Moana,” “Ralph Breaks the Internet,” “Frozen 2,” “Raya and the Last Dragon,” and the upcoming 2021 feature release, “Encanto.”