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Nick Waltz: A Visit from Pixar's Storyboard Artist and Animator

By Bob Biffman

Here's an Exclusive Interview with Nick Waltz, a lead Storyboard artist at Pixar, and Veteran animator who's worked for Pixar for over a Decade.

Q: How did you become an animator? Are there any qualifications needed to become a professional animator?

A: Becoming an animator was always a dream, i ended up doing a lot electives in high school like computer science, coding, 3D art, and even joining a film club. Basically, I thought that anything that's computer related that can be applied creatively, could become useful animating. After high school, I joined a Institute called called CalArts, or California Institute of the Arts, somewhere in Valencia. It's one of the more popular places in the states to study computer animation and get a degree in art related subjects. It took me 4 years to to

earn a master's degree in computer animation, which is actually the normal amount of time. There's not really actually any qualifications to become an animator, but it's generally recommended and sometimes required, that you have at least a bachelor degree in animation or related field, like video editing, sound editing, or kinematics. After after earning my degree at CalArts, I sent a job application to Pixar for a job in character animation or Storyboard artist position. Some time passes, a job interview is scheduled, i'm asked a few questions about my background and work experience, and then I was hired. I was given the job as a Storyboard artist assistant, and I was later promoted a to lead Storyboard artist and sometimes assisted in character animation.

Q: What is it like to be an animator?

A: The life of an animator can be frustrating and even stressful... Or at least when you have to work additional work hours to meet deadlines. The average amount of work hours an animator puts in, is around 35 to 40 hours of work per week. So around 6 hours of work at most everyday, not including additional work hours. But most animators are freelancers, so like basically, the movie director will assign an animator a job to do and a given deadline the job must

be done. So it's all up to the animator to decide his or her work schedule. But otherwise it could be lots of fun. Animating requires lots of focus, patience, and it just takes a lot of thinking, problem-solving, and overall creativity.

Q: As a Storyboard artist, how do you go about creating Storyboards?

A: A lot of people think that a Storyboard is like one huge, briefly scripted comic, taped on a wall, showing the entirety of a movie. But it's more than that. Storyboarding can let you see an entire movie put on paper which could allow you to do many things, like finding storytelling issues or making sure everybody has a good idea and understanding of the movie, and that basically everybody's on the same page. Storyboarding basically just allows us to see the entire movie before any animation work is put in. Storyboarding usually takes around 6 weeks or so to complete. That concludes my brief explanation on Storyboarding.

Q: Are there different animation methods? If so, which ones are you most familiar with?

A: In my spare time, I would always brush up on the history of how animation came to be, along with the different types of animation methods that were developed. I'll just go through a couple animation methods I've studied. Let's start with an old, hand-done, traditional animation method, Cel animation. Cel Animation works like this: Cel animation uses sheets of transparent paper called Cels, to which animated cartoon characters are painted on and photographed to create the illusion of movement. With layers of cells, static objects can be drawn once and reused, while characters could be drawn again and again to create movement at 24 frames per second. The other animation method I want to mention is a modern, computer based animation method, CGI. Computer Generated Imagery. CGI works like this: CGI is a process which is used for generating animated images and encompassing both static scenes and dynamic images in a 3D format and even on a 2D format, by drawing frames on tablet or computer. That sums up my lecture on two

animation methods that are used by professional animators.

Q: For my final question, What inspired you to become an animator?

A: Ever since I was a kid, I LOVED cartoons. Almost every spare moment I got I would spend my time watching cartoons. One of my favorite cartoons to watch was SpongeBob. I just found the show silly and hilarious. Something that silly inspired me to drawing become an animator. I was also inspired by Studio Ghibli for producing many of my favorite animated films, like Ponyo. Studio Ghibli create such beautifully films with only traditional methods of animation . Later in my Childhood I then found the idea of being able to draw out any idea you had in your mind with nothing but a pencil and a piece of paper, simply fascinating, and just plain fun. I think it was around 4th grade when I developed a passion for drawing. I hope that all your questions have been answered and that you have a good day! Thank You!