

A SHORT ANIMATED FILM
ENTITLED *TIMELESS*
A STORY OF REGRET AND SECOND CHANCES

A CREATIVE PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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MUNCIE, INDIANA

MAY 2016

Statement of the Problem

The animation industry has made terrific strides in the past few years as a sincere focus on story and style have become much more prominent. The ideas of obtaining cheap entertainment through comedy or achieving appeal through hyper realism have taken a back seat. My film is a continuation of this trend as an attempt to establish myself as a part of the industry. I want to create a strong sense of style and storyline to showcase my artistic talent as well as storytelling ability. Presenting myself as a competent professional in the industry is a personal goal of mine with this film and is something I want to work towards in future projects. There are three key technical aspects that I have incorporated into my film. They are: staging and screen composition, the color and tone and the music composition.

Timeless is narrated in a single, continuous shot. The screen will be split to allow the viewer to see the lives of the two characters unfold at the same time. Because two stories will be happening simultaneously, managing screen flow and staging is an important aspect of my film. Keeping the audience entertained while avoiding overloading their visual senses with information is a challenging task for my film. Interaction between the two sides of the screen will also be a unique and interesting way of making the events engaging. Much of film today prefers to use a long cut, but in animation, it is fairly less common. Utilizing it in animation will be a unique way of applying a film style in order to achieve the goal of my film. Additionally, utilizing a wide or super-wide screen format helps ease the audience into this viewing style because the wide screen will provide enough space to give each side room to breathe and provide a more dynamic screen flow between the two intertwining stories.

Color is an important part of a film, as it helps set the mood for a story. In my film, I plan on using monochrome and sepia-tone to invoke a feeling of monotony and tediousness to certain

parts of the film. By introducing color in to other parts, it will highlight those parts and help guide the eye direction of the film. For me personally, monochrome has a nostalgic feel to it. Nostalgia is a feeling I hope to appeal to as the viewer begins to empathize with their own feelings of regret. Since emotion is the driving force in my art, I measure the success of my piece by the strength of the emotion it invokes. Using every tool and trick to help strengthen emotions is a necessity for me. Monochrome in the industry is widely used, even in animation. Color correction and themed color is a common tool in any style of film. The use of monochrome in the animated short: *Paperman* is a major influence in my film. Sepia tone is used to create a strong sense of boredom, monotony and the overall feeling of the daily grind of life. The sepia-tone style, as seen in *Paperman*, is something that I also want to incorporate in my film.

Music, in a similar manner as color, directs the flow of the piece. Using a single score to help guide the viewer as well as amplify the emotion is an important part of my thesis. Contemporary film utilizes many different tracks of music to sonically direct the audience into feeling a certain way, based on the scene. My film takes place in one cut; hence I am using a singular music piece that changes over the flow of the film rather than using a different track every time I want to change the mood. This presents a very difficult challenge, as creating a piece that changes as the films tone changes requires careful timing and collaboration with the musician composing the score.

Review of Literature and Influences

There were many influences for my film but the biggest influence was the short film *Jinxy Jenkins and Lucky Lou*. The main story is about two characters meeting and sharing a moment, or in the case of Jenkins and Lou, a wild adventure. The general feel and aesthetic of this film are two things that I am really inspired by. My characters are similarly constructed and the somewhat off-kilter design of the environment is something that I emulate as well. *Paperman*, by Disney animation studios is a very close second in my influential pieces of work. The story elements of a chance encounter and the lack of satisfaction with the return to normal life are both key to my story as well. The use of color, or more specifically, sepia tone, in the film really helps create the feeling of monotony. When the red lip stick is introduced, our eyes are immediately drawn to it. In my film, the use of color is paramount in keeping the audience focused on the action in the film. The use and meaning behind the emotions created through monotone were something I discovered through the book *Monochrome Memories*. In it, the author really helped me understand why monochrome evokes this feeling of nostalgia and I was able to apply it to my film in a way that maximized its effectiveness. Color alone is simply not enough though. I had to make sure that my characters were also relatable. This way, the audience could really invest themselves in the film. *Character emotion in 2D and 3D animation* was an important part of my research when it came to animating my characters. Form, silhouette and body language are important aspects of animation. Character animation really helps create this type of character, that is why the two short films *Thought of you* and *Alight*, had a major impact in my piece. The characters in *Alight* are distinguished by the element that makes them up, namely fire and water. Fire is much more energetic and “sparky” while water is much more graceful and fluid. Using animation to explain what a characters personality is like is a really effective means of

developing their personality without dialogue. Since my film has no dialogue, it is not only effective, it is necessary. *Thought of you* is actually a music video, and though the character animation is superb, it actually influenced my characters in a different way. The characters in the music video are actually based off of a choreographed video that was created specifically for the short. The way that they relate to the music is very powerful. In my film, I am using many elements to create effective emotion and music is yet another element I can utilize to create this. Music is a really good element at creating or at least evoking emotion. The article “Some Mental Aspects of Music” from *The Journal of Mental Science* was an informative part of my project in how music affects us as humans. Music can often-times have a negative connotation in film. Many consider it a cheap way of creating emotion. In a visual field, music is often used to tell the audience how to feel rather than showing them in a similar way that dialogue does. I would argue against such a point. Every element has its place in film, and no element can detract from another unless it is used improperly. Music is simply another strong element that must be used properly just like any other element. For instance, in the Disney-Pixar film *UP*, there is a short sequence, towards the beginning, that was really influential for a part of my film. Some people would simply view the sequence as a montage, which might be considered very cliché, but the emotion that is invoked from the very short part is very powerful. In my film, after my two main characters leave the bus stop, there is a segment of the film where they go through their lives and we get a glimpse of their entire lives. *UP* contained a similar part in a montage-like format. Looking at the ups and downs of the segment in *UP* allowed me to maximize the efficiency of my one montage-like segment in a way that was effective. My final three influences, *The Animator’s Survival Kit* and *The Illusion of Life* as well as the Digital Tutors website were all helpful whenever I found myself stuck in a technical problem. Both books are filled with

information on everything animation. Practically animators' Bibles, I always found myself returning to them whenever I needed help with animation or design.

Images of Artwork and Making of the Film

Timeless comes from an Idea I worked on during my undergraduate study. As with all stories, it has been molded and reformed into something completely different to the original idea. I wanted to emphasize the ideas of regret and second chances. This film is a chance for me to reimagine an idea that was not carried to completion the first time and that drive for second chances is an important ingredient in this film.

Reimagining the project began by changing the main beats. Beat boards are what animators use to outline all the major plot points of their film. Capturing each of these “beats” in a single drawn image is the purpose of beat boards. Following beat boards, we break down those main points into smaller sections through the use of story boards. Similar to beat boards, story boards go even further, they are images of what happens between the beats. Clear and concise story boards help the audience move through the story. Story is the key purpose of this film, and as such this part of the pre-production process required the most work. As the story began to work itself out, I began to focus on the individual characters.

Character concept was the next step in my film. Imagining not only how they looked, but their personalities, habits, and demeanors were important parts of giving them life. My female character, by the name of Kara, is a quiet but excitable girl, whose emotions can run high if given the chance. A secret romantic, she quietly waits for those perfect moments in life that seem to be just around the corner, sometimes letting those moments

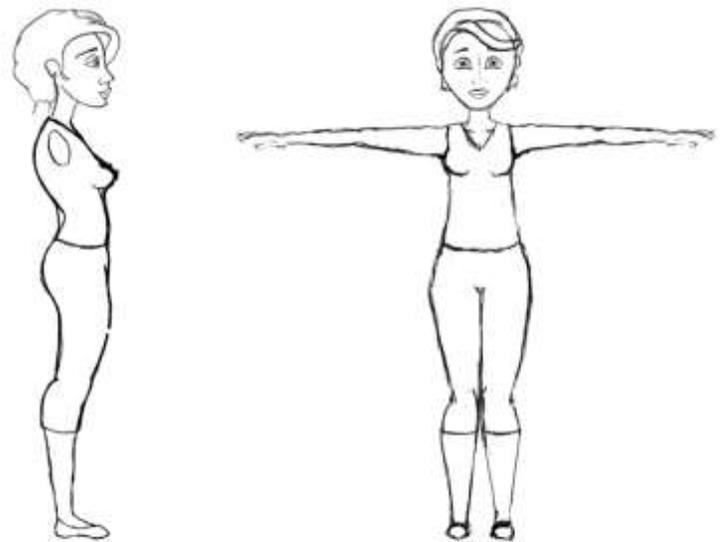


Figure 1 : Kara Design

pass her by if they were not exactly perfect. Leo, the male character, by contrast, is a bit more reserved. Just as quiet as Kara, but quite a bit more timid, knowing what to say can be difficult for him and sometimes he loses out on opportunity because of it.

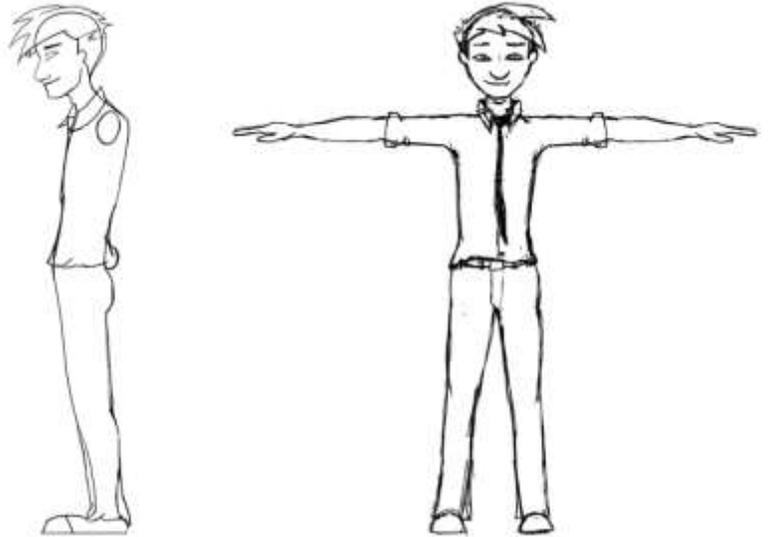


Figure 2 : Leo Design

As the characters began to work themselves out, I went back to the story to begin the transition into the production phase. I took my storyboards and broke them down into individual acting beats for the characters. These beats were then placed into a timed sequence in order to establish the delicate pacing of the story. This is what we call an animatic. Taking all of the storyboards and beat boards and placing them into a timed out video is the basis of an animatic. By digitalizing my still images and putting them together in a timed out movie file, I was able to achieve the pacing that I desired. An animatic serves as the blueprints for the rest of the production process. It also is the first look at some of the interesting techniques I was going to try, such as the split screen format. Seeing how this format played out in real time was a key step in deciding its effectiveness and whether it could be included in the project.

The next step was making the transition from flat images to 3D in the computer. Using my animatic as I guide and stand in props, I created a basic layout in 3D utilizing a program called Maya. The difference between 2D and 3D is monumental. In 2D, designs for characters can be stylized, in proportionate or abstract in design, but in 3D, careful thought need to be given to how they move in 3D space. Some things that work perfectly well in 2D, are impossible to

replicate in 3D and vice versa, so this step was still very important for understanding what the overall feel of the piece would be. Understanding special relationships and camera angles for shots would make the production process proceed smoother.

After I was able to work out all the obstacles in the transition between 2D and 3D, I turned my attention to transitioning my character designs as well. Utilizing the digital sculpting tool Mudbox, I was able to sculpt my characters into three dimensions and begin to implement them into my



Figure 3 : Kara Model

work. I found this process to be very rewarding. The sense of accomplishment gained from completing a character is a very satisfying feeling. Sticking to the original designs was a challenge because of obstacles that separate 2D and 3D. Kara, in particular took a while to work out since many characteristics that really add personality in two dimensions, really break down and can even detract from a character in three dimensions. It was important to be appealing as a



Figure 4 : Leo Model

pair as well as on their own since they occupy the same world. A differing style in either one would cause a disconnect that could not be worked around. Part of the story is that the audience wants these two to be together and if

they are so different that they appear to live in two separate worlds, that begins to break down the story.

Modeling the characters is only part of the process of character creation. Modeling only provides the skin of the character, giving them skeletons so they can bend and move like actual people is the second part of creating the character. This process is called rigging, it requires a lot of experimentation and trial and error. For me, this involved a bit of new ground for me. Rigging was never a forte of mine, but through the process of rigging Kara and Leo, a gained a very inticute knowledge of the entire process. When I finally was able to begin animation with the characters, it was a very satisfying feeling. A unique facet of my characters involves what is called blend shapes. My film contains more than just these two characters, there are two additional characters named Cloe and Chris. Rather than modeling and rigging two entirely new characters though, I utilized the blend shapes tool to morph Kara and Leo into their secondary chracter counterparts. I also utilized this tool to make older versions of Kara and Leo, so that they could slowly age over the course of the film.

At this point I began animating with the characters. Hitting the key points, the beats that I laid out at the beginning of the process, was the most important part, without those, the entire



Figure 5 : Early Stages of animation

story would fall through. Numerous times I would rework poses and timing to hold a look for a few more moments, or to promote a clearer emotions and feelings in my characters.



Figure 6 : Early Stages of animation(2)

Also at this time, the process of replacing my stand in props began. With my guidance, my graduate assistant began creating houses, benches, and numerous other assets that fit in with the style of my film. Creating a world for the characters in which they could act out this story was very important. From the modeling to the textures and color palates, everything needed to be seamless and coordinated. Since I am utilizing the split screen format, I wanted to create a different feel on each side of the screen as the two characters interact in their own separate environments. Making them different, but still feel like they exist in the same reality was one of my key goals.



Figure 7 : Split Screen

The split screen format and the numerous effects to create a believable passage of time between events, was all completed in post-production work. Color correction was used to help create a cohesive production as well as utilizing the color to guide the eye around the screen. Sound and music played a key role as well since the production has no dialogue.



Figure 8 : Color Saturation



Figure 9 : Suburban Environment



Figure 10 : City Environment



Figure 11 : Flower Texture



Figure 12 : Blend Shapes creating older models

Conclusion

In conclusion, my film distinguishes itself from the current industry through a unique blend of color, music, and composition: utilizing color as a means to create a sense of nostalgia and emotion, music to build that emotion as well as influence character animation and screen format as a unique element and aid in story telling technique. Using these three elements while building upon and improving current industry narrative through a meaningful use of story and emotion are the defining features of my thesis. Establishing myself as a part of the industry is my main goal, and a display of my ability to effectively use these elements is the main purpose behind this thesis.

Exhibition Statement

Timeless is a short animated film that is set in a city; a man and a woman sit on a bench at a bus stop. At first, they do not engage with each other, but after a trivial accident, their attention is drawn to one another. They talk and share a brief, possibly romantic moment, but before it has time to fully mature, the bus arrives and the man must depart. To complicate the moment further, a surprise thunderstorm begins, hastening the couple's separation. The couples live their lives separately, but their romantic relationships with other people never seem to work out. Finally, after they have lived out the majority of their lives, they meet again and are given a second chance to make a real connection during the moment that they missed out on so long ago.

This short film calls to the front, all the choices we make: some we regret and others we are happy we made. Recalling these moments and giving hope for future moments is this film's purpose. Everyone has regrets; this film not only serves as a moving story about such regrets, but also a source of hope for people looking for their own second chance at such moments.

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