Ratatouille, © Disney/Pixar

Andrew Gordon

Supervising Animator - Pixar Animation Studios

In recent years, animation has made the leap from 2D cartoon to 3D feature film. Always in the front line, Pixar Animation Studios have kept up a stream of memorable masterpieces and the good work keeps on coming. They seem so busy that it is surprising that they have time to leave the studio at all, so when Andrew Gordon, Supervising Animator at Pixar Animation Studios, was recently in Melbourne to undertake the second Autodesk Animation Workshop, Kate McCurdy took the opportunity to explore a few key points.

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(above, left)
Monsters Inc, © Disney/Pixar

(above, right)
Finding Nemo, © Disney/Pixar

Beginnings at Pixar

Andrew Gordon joined Pixar in 1997 as an animator on their second feature film *A Bug's Life*. Since then he has worked on every Pixar film including significant work in *Toy Story 2*, *Monsters Inc.*, *Finding Nemo*, *The Incredibles*, *Cars* and *Ratatouille*. He has most recently worked as supervising animator for Pixar's new original short film, which will be released theatrically with *WALL•E* later this year.

The process of characterisation

While Gordon admits to having what may be called an 'animators' box of tricks, such as canned gestures, cadence of walks, as well as hand and mouth shapes; a lot of his characterisations come from his own improvising. When approaching a new project, he explains that he will take a day or two to plan and think about the aims, goals, thematic elements such as comedy, and the entertainment value. He will often film himself acting, for example, he will put on skiboots and walk around in an exaggerated fashion to see how it may affect the character. Gordon says that, for him, the most important thing to do first when constructing a character is to 'get the walk'.

Quality assurance

Andrew Gordon believes that Disney animation has historically had a definitive style and the high level of quality has been maintained by the animators. Similarly, Pixar's strong creative style and direction that has become familiar with audiences ever since the release of *Toy Story* is largely due John Lasseter. Lasseter, chief creative officer of Pixar and Disney Animation Studios and principal creative advisor at Walt Disney Imagineering, trained with Disney animators and brought with him the strong attention to detail and quality to his work and the team at Pixar.

Above all, Gordon believes that a 'good story' makes a good film, and that animated films these days are becoming increasingly adult which gives them a further enduring quality. He is also a firm believer in the films having a message, and he would apply this principle to his own films which he hopes to direct in the future. He would very much like to make short films with his own ideas, because right now while he enjoys the projects that he's working on, 'they're all based on someone else's ideas, not your own'. He's very interested in period pieces from the 1920s, but ultimately it comes back to a good story plus interesting, funny characters with some depth to them.

Animation education - workshops and blogs

Having taught animation since 2000, Gordon is no stranger to the teacher's role. When he's not animating or after a project wraps, he enjoys travelling, taking his message of style and substance to animation students and professionals worldwide. He recalls that his best experiences as a student was getting information from 'the people who are doing it', and he feels now like he is able to give something back with the workshops, as well as his collaborative blog SplineDoctors.

SplineDoctors

SplineDoctors is a blog founded by a number of prominent animators at Pixar, including Andrew Gordon and dedicated to animation education. The blog includes links, videos, and also podcasts or 'SplineCasts' to which anyone can subscribe. Brad Bird, writer and director of Pixar films *The Incredibles* and *Ratatouille*, is an enthusiastic supporter of the development of Splinedoctors. The SplineCasts include interviews with Brad Bird; Dr. Ed Catmull, co-founder of Pixar Animation Studios and president of Pixar and Disney Animation Studios; Andrew Stanton, writer, director and animator of *Finding Nemo* and the upcoming *WALL•E*; Pete Doctor, writer and director of *Monsters Inc.*; as well as 'roundtable' discussions with Andrew Gordon and other animators associated with Pixar. Frequently updated with new podcasts and blog items, Splinedoctors is an inspiring and priceless resource for animation students and professionals alike.

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