



John Canemaker, Oscar Winner

By Jake Friedman

On Oscar night, March 3rd, something amazing happened. The CG Disney characters of Chicken Little and Ducky Lucky opened the envelope for Best Animation Short and our own John Canemaker walked away with an Academy Award.

We weren't just rooting for John's film, *The Moon and the Son*, because his books taught us about Otto Messmer and Mary Blair, or because in the classroom he directly affected so many of us. When he got up on that podium, a New York independent animator, all of us were right there with him. The win hit a home run for our community and reminded people around the country that there's some great stuff coming out of the Big Apple. And the chosen media, John's signature paints and pencils, sang a celebration of hand-drawn animation in an age where the award presenter was a CG chicken.

The Moon and the Son speaks for itself in volumes. Nonetheless, I took advantage of the opportunity to ask John a few questions about the film.

JF: How long did it take to complete *The Moon and the Son*?

JC: *The Moon and the Son* was begun in August 1999 thanks to a Rockefeller Foundation residency grant in Bellagio, Italy. After a month working on the concept art at the Rockefeller villa on Lake Como, I came back to New York with a working storyboard and a first-draft script. I re-boarded, refined and re-wrote, and then created an animatic with the story sketches and voice-overs by Eli Wallach and me. My producer, Peggy Stern, came onto the project and we got some NYSCA grant funding to advance further. She also brought on David Mehlman as editor and sound designer. I brought in an NYU colleague for the music -- Ron Sadoff. The team kept working on it. But I lost a year on the film from Fall 2001 through Fall 2002 because I took on the duties of Chair of the NYU Tisch School of the Arts Kanbar Institute of Film & Television. It was also the 9/11 year and so I was kept pretty busy at school. Somewhere along the line, HBO came in with finishing funds, John Turturro replaced me as the son's voice, I got the animation completed and colored and shot (by Gary Becker's 35 mm camera) and the film premiered on January 5, 2005 as part of the "Premieres" film series for the reopening of MoMA.

JF: It's a very personal piece. What did you set out to do when you started the film? Did you make it with an audience in mind?

JC: I made it with me in mind. It is a personal exploration that I made to settle things in my own mind and life. Animation can do that. And I wanted to explore my very personal ideas and concerns in a way that is far removed from live-action realism. I had no big plans for the film. I just made it because I had to.

JF: Your film is very unique in its emotional and autobiographical nature. What did you look towards for inspiration?

JC: I have always been inspired by the artistry and honesty found in the films by Faith and John Hubley. They pointed the way in terms of self-expression, use of autobiographical elements, and a painterly, expressionistic free-form way of

presenting memory, inner thoughts, and emotions. Faith was also a close personal friend who constantly encouraged me to make this film, to tell my own story my way. I miss her greatly. In terms of magical realism in films, I love Fellini and Michael Powell.

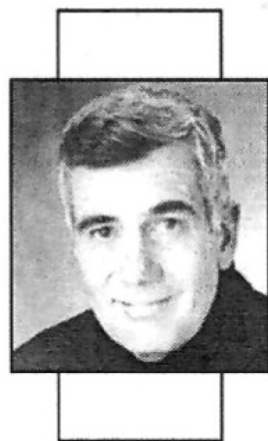
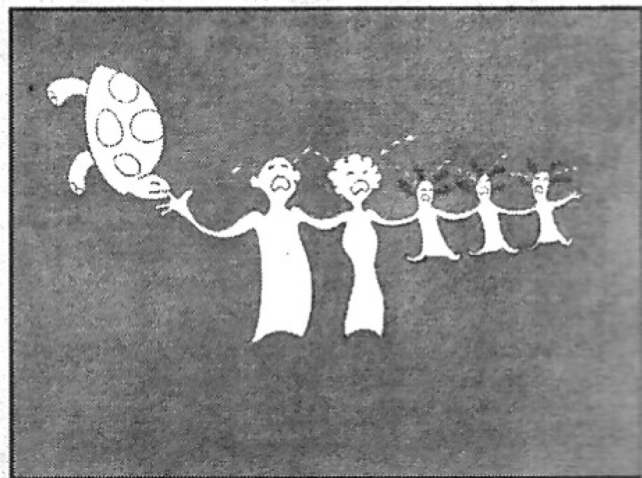
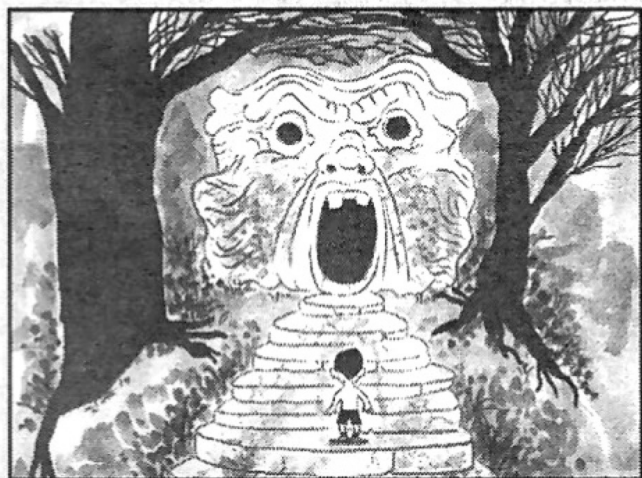
JF: In your Oscar speech, you noted the importance of 2D animation. In what ways is it important?

JC: Hand-drawn animation is a great art form that is as viable and valid a means of expression as CGI. It should continue to be explored and utilized by moving image artists alone or in tandem with CGI for its immediacy, warmth and unique expressive power.

JF: How do I make an Oscar-winning film?

JC: Make a film. Kiss a rabbit's foot.

Jake Friedman is a New-York based animator. Visit him at www.jakefriedman.net and check out his cover story on NY local Candy Kugel at www.fpsmagazine.com/mag.



ASIFA-East congratulates John Canemaker who won an Oscar in the Best Animated Short Film category for his autobiographical film *The Moon and the Son: An Imagined Conversation*. The 78th Annual Academy Awards for outstanding film achievements were presented on March 5, 2006 at the Kodak Theater in Hollywood.

