



Making Ruby Gloom in Harmony

The sheer creative freedom Harmony offers the Ruby Gloom team has helped create a very unique and visually stunning product that has, and is, commanding the worldwide attention it deserves.

Robin Budd has been passionately immersed in the animation business for 29 years. The seventies and eighties were focused on full, fluid traditional character animation of television specials for Nelvana, and feature films both in Toronto and Tokyo. In 1989, he directed his first television series, Tim Burton's Beetlejuice, and won an Emmy for most outstanding series. Years of feature development followed, for both Nelvana and Paramount Pictures. He joined Disney studios in the late nineties and directed the sequels to Peter Pan, Return to NeverLand. The focus then shifted to storyboard work on a variety of television series, such as Sam and Max, Clone High, Jacob Two-two, and 6Teen. His most recent work is development and direction of Gerald McBoing Boing and Ruby Gloom.

Darin Bristow has worked at Nelvana for over 12 years serving in a variety of 2D and 3D capacities. His 2D skills can be seen on such series as Eek! The Cat, Sam and Max: Freelance Police, and his 3D skills on such projects as Rescue Heroes: The Movie, Miss Spider, and Handy Manny. Darin is currently Ruby Gloom's Supervising Technical Director and offered us these observations.

"I did it. I came back to 2D from 3D, and my timing couldn't have been better! The advances in Toon Boom's latest animation system were the key. Whenever a work meeting



would take me for a wander through the Nelvana 2D department, I would always look over the shoulders of fellow employees to see what the current state of the medium was and ask myself "do I miss that?" The first year the answer was "not yet". The technological advances in the 3D realm had kept me intrigued. I felt the nostalgic pang of seeing people sketching and erasing away, but at the time 3D felt right. It felt like the future. The second year the answer was still "not yet", but something seemed on the horizon. Something big. Fast-forward a few years (and series) later, I was venturing through the 2D domain one day and saw then what we now call 'Harmony'. When I stopped to see the endless possibilities it offered, only one word went through my mind- "Now". Harmony's technology really offered the tools to effectively blur the line between the 2D and 3D realms" shares Darin.

"Luis Lopez, a Senior Technical Producer at Nelvana, offered me the chance to learn Harmony for a new 2D Digital series called Ruby Gloom and act as its Supervising Technical Director. Luis was about to revamp and implement new production pipeline procedures for our 2D digital department and he wanted me to be part of that team, so I snatched up the opportunity and haven't looked back. We knew that Harmony was a solid application ready to handle any challenge we threw at it. In this latest version, the software has taken a huge leap forward in the level of visual story telling. Our most recent production, Ruby Gloom has implemented this technology, mixing it with the fundamentals of traditional animation movement, and the results are fantastic. We are looking for a cartoon, with all the zip and snap found in the shorts of the forties and fifties. Harmony has been the key to the look, movement, and overall feel of this production."

"By designing our show with Harmony's strengths (and weaknesses) in mind, all the fluid stretch and squash found in traditional animation is possible. A major factor to the

successful movement is found in the timing. For example, violent, snappy movement is absolutely brilliant with this system. Subtle anticipation before a major movement, along with a settle into a hold following that violent move, disguises the stretch and distortion of the move itself. We want to feel the fluidity more than see it. Understanding these animation fundamentals of early “limited” animation from historic studios like UPA and Hanna Barbara are crucial in harnessing the strengths of Harmony. The characters are quite flat and 2D, but by using the techniques of snappy animation coupled with the 3D set, the limitations are virtually non-existent.”

The story ideas set by producer Merle Anne Ridley and story editor Carolyn Hay required an animation approach that allowed complete flexibility. Massive zoom-ins, zip pans, or the more subtle movement such as slow moving clouds and atmospheres are no problem. With careful attention to pre-production and of course the animation itself, strong character performance is very achievable.

“We all knew from day 1 that this show was going to be fresh, fun, and inventive. Combined with our WACOM Cintiqs, Harmony offers the technological sum of everything that was great about traditional 2D Animation of the past, mixed in with all that is great about digital Animation of the present, and then adds the heavy dose of the future. The result is something new and visually cutting edge. No matter what

the visual challenges demanded by the director, Harmony would handle it. The visually popping the graphic, stylized art direction of the Ruby Gloom characters took us into the land of using highly detailed painterly Photoshop Backgrounds Designs. Many of these digital bitmap paintings contained upwards of 10-15 layers, all at 150 dpi, making them quite large- but yet Harmony handled them with ease. So easy in fact, we soon found that we could increase our source BG resolutions up to 300 dpi to maintain visual integrity in order to support Ruby Gloom’s High-Definition composites, and zany zoom-in Camera moves.”

The Ruby Gloom character designs also proved a 2D digital challenge themselves, Director Robin Budd wanted to maintain the ‘no-outline’ look of Ruby’s initial designs, yet have a percentage-coloured line form only when two identical colours passed over one another, and have an offset character ‘rim light’ throughout Animation. The fundamental art direction mantra was ‘light against dark’ for maximum character ‘pop’, but that became an issue with some of the established dark costume against the dark backgrounds. “Using Harmony’s highly advanced Networks and tools, we were able to avoid a potential animation nightmare by simply rigging all these features right into the character models, thus keeping it off the Animators’ shoulders, and Production friendly. It allowed the Animation team to just work freely, and due to how we rigged each Character up front, the rim light would make itself by offsetting the Animators keyframe’s and not worry about it.”

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