



A JIMI THING: With Hendrix looking over them, Bridges alumni Francisco Rosales and David Salvador discuss technique at CrainRoyer Studios. The Jimi Hendrix Foundation helps finance the Bridges Institute of Visual Arts, providing scholarships.

Dangerous Minds, Safe Hands

CrainRoyer's Program for Inner City Youth Keeps Hope Alive
While it Draws on Dreams of Animation Careers

By Michael Mallory

Animation mentors Bruce Royer and Linda Crain, Ph.D., do not think small. This month the founders of Santa Monica-based CrainRoyer Studios, a uniquely progressive training facility, will transform the Pasadena Civic Auditorium into the biggest animation studio on the planet, with 2,000 artists jamming on the production of an unprecedented 80 minutes of completed animation in just *nine hours*—with a screening of

the results three days later.

Just contemplating the logistics of Animation 2000, presented in conjunction with the first World Animation Celebration, would boggle most minds. For Royer and Crain, however, the feat exemplifies their knack for turning seemingly impossible dreams into reality.

Wish fulfillment takes up as much of the curriculum at CrainRoyer's Bridges Institute of Visual Arts as layout and in-betweening. The Bridges program arose in 1994 from workshops Royer, a live-action producer, conducted for sever-

al years in Los Angeles' inner-city high schools, which employed teens, many of them truants, active (or potential) gangbangers or other problem students, in creating animated anti-drug PSAs, notably for the D.A.R.E. program. "A lot of kids who would show up at these workshops were 'street kids,' and it was the first time they'd shown up in school in three weeks. But their skill level was unbelievable," Royer says. "The gap between their dreams and getting a job was just too large. They kept asking, 'How do I get in the [animation] business?'"

Royer had no answers until he and Crain, a clinical psychologist and writer, brought one into existence. Their straightforward goal focused on opening a full-fledged 'toon shop offering extensive vocational training in both traditional and computer animation for those who might otherwise not have access to a four-year college or established art school. Reality, though, proved much tougher. "We could not have planned a more difficult first year, because of lot of the students were in continuation high school, and a lot of them were gang-bangers," Royer says. "But the heart of what we wanted to do was established in that first year."

In its three years of operation, the Institute has grown beyond the label of an art school with a social conscience. With Royer and Crain acting as *de facto* agents for the Bridges students, CrainRoyer Studios (which originally operated as AnimAction Studios) now serves as a major talent pipeline for Hollywood's booming animation business. About 90 percent of its students have already landed entry-level positions at big-league toon shops such as Walt Disney Television Animation, Film Roman, Warner Bros. Feature Animation, Chuck Jones Film Productions and commercial house Baer Animation. A few other grads have found jobs in comic book production.

The skill and professionalism of the Institute's trainees—some of them still in their teens, when many of the classic-period animators began their careers—has opened the eyes of the industry as well. "People are shocked when I say I'm going to bring in a high school student as a trainee," says Phyllis Craig, intern coordinator and color design supervisor for Film Roman, which has taken on a half-dozen Bridges grads. "They think, 'A kid that never *worked* before?' But we haven't had one spot of trouble, either socially or work-wise, with any one of them. They have a focus that isn't in most art students. They're focused to be team members."

The Bridges program offers classes five days a week, six hours a day, all taught by professional animation instructors, many imported from other established art schools, including CalArts. The classes cover all facets of

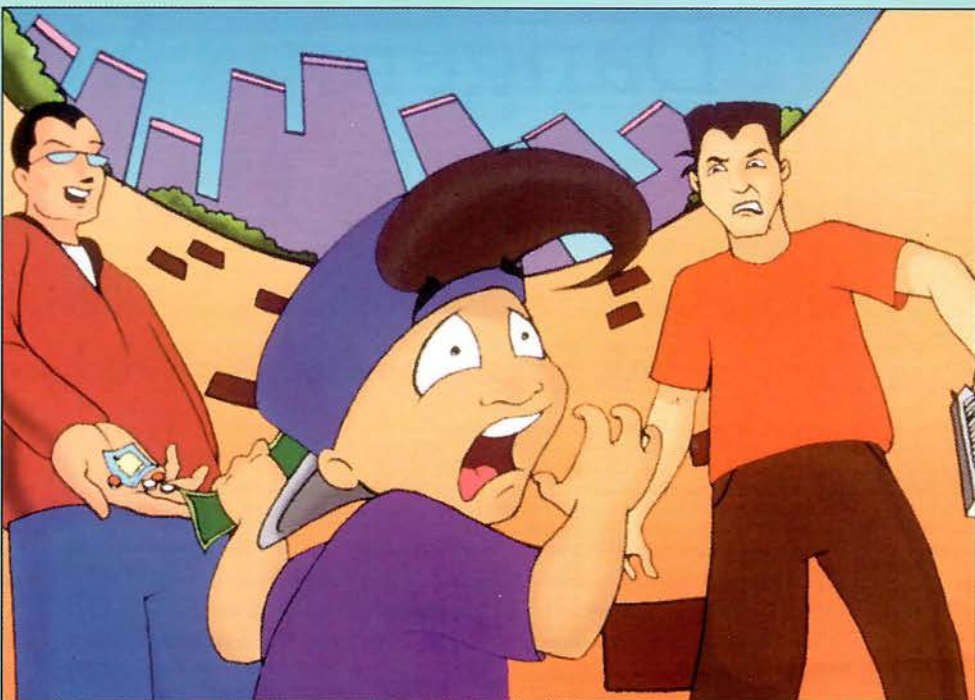
modern cartooning—life drawing, character design, background painting, story development, timing, acting, digital ink-and-paint technique, 2D and 3D computer imaging, even website design

effects house in Los Angeles' Toon Belt for weekly seminars.

In addition to learning how to wield pencils, push pixels or flip drawings, the young artists get serious



TOON GUIDES: *It may not be Toontown, but Linda Crain, Ph.D. and Bruce Royer help would-be animators into a world they might never have imagined possible or impractical.*



Bridges trainees and alumni created "Lucky," a 30-second PSA for the Partnership for a Drug Free America. Such training makes Bridges students ripe for animation house positions.

and virtual reality—as well as practical instruction in preparing a portfolio and creating a demo reel. In addition, CrainRoyer attracts professionals from virtually every major studio and special

life-lessons. "We know we can train them professionally, but most people in the workplace struggle personally, especially young people," says Crain. "They don't understand that it's ruthless,

ART AND SOUL

Bridges' Program Turns Students Inward to Discover Their True Gifts and True Grit

By Eric Olson

Francisco Rosales recently finished work on *Space Jam* for Warner Bros. Feature Animation, his permanent employer.

In the real world, that's what's known as a cosmic leap. "I was working at Thrifty doing inventory," Rosales recalls. "I was just doing freelance art stuff. I had been into drawing and studied taking commercial art and illustration. But I was totally different before."

That is, before Rosales discovered someone cared.

While animation creates a unified vision from thousands of seemingly similar but critically dissimilar cels, the teams of artists creating those puzzle pieces bring unique experiences to their work. Whatever the length of their life stories, the Bridges Program at Bridges Institute of Visual Arts—once known as AnimAction—helps students come to terms with their own and their classmates' personal histories as well as their art, building talented animators and confident human beings as well. The Studio's founding principals Linda Crain, Ph.D. and Bruce Royer recognize that developing the whole person, instead of just the animator, lies at the root of success.

CrainRoyer's program hones student skills to real-world studio employers' needs by asking about them.

"The [animation] industry is in need of talent at such a high level right now in both feature and commercial animation," says Crain, whose programs teach traditional cel techniques as well as their transplantation to the modern computer environment. "Between now and 2000, they will need thousands of people who have the ability to animate. You can teach people the software, but what we do is train artists to use the computer as if it were a brush. Anybody can turn on the computer, but they have to bring the creativity."

Crain classifies Bridges students as "in transition." Side-tracked housewives work alongside recent high school graduates, sharing at least one com-

mon interest: a job in animation.

"We emphasize that they have unlimited capacity and will only be limited by their imagination," explains Crain of such classes as LifeSearch. "If they are willing to put forth the effort, we will provide them with the knowledge, skills and information. If they focus their attention, they can move beyond any limit that they have placed in their own way. After 12 months of hearing that, they go into the industry with their eyes open, and confident."

When Rosales came to CrainRoyer two years ago, he was anything but that. "Francisco was a little shy and introverted," Crain recalls. Francisco's brother-in-law, a Bridges student at the time, convinced Rosales to chance the program.

Rosales says the small-studio atmosphere and intense classes at CrainRoyer gave his work a concentration it previously lacked. "I would have to spend a lot of time in the studio to accomplish what I wanted," he says. "I think [the program] did a lot to change me."

A year ago, Rosales arrived at Warner Bros. strongly prepared, having taken classes based on the expectations of the profession, and manifesting the studio's stringent training. "When I left [CrainRoyer], I was a step ahead," he says. "I had already been through a similar program. AnimAction prepared me well and gave me that chance to show off my work. If it wasn't for them, I wouldn't be where I am now."

Twenty-year-old Tracy Wells graduated high school envisioning the life of a veterinarian. Now she works for Walt Disney Television Animation as a production coordinator and production manager of the upcoming (irony noted) *101 Dalmatians* television series.

Her high school art teacher told her about the then novel AnimAction program, and she became one of its first students. Wells narrowed her general interest in animation as she learned more about it. "The best part of the program was learning the art of animation," said

Wells. "For me, it was learning that I didn't like doing the in-betweens and discovering the backgrounds."

The young artist discovered her natural tendencies ("I'm an organization freak") and a career. She found it frustrating, working in a team of animators, but that her LifeSearch classes had even readied her for handling work-group anxiety. "I can now, like, meditate when I'm stressed and calm down," says Wells. "It prepared me for the stress of adjusting to this kind of job. It can be a tough workplace."

Jose Zelaya also finished high school set on becoming a doctor, which meant leaving his love of drawing behind, a casualty of practical reality. But Zelaya knew Royer through AnimAction America, a series of in-class career-development seminars. Royer asked Zelaya if he would get with the program, confronting him with one of those life-defining moments.

"Bruce told me that he would give me a shot at making cartoons," Zelaya said. "He saw so much art in the schools and thought about what these kids would do once they were done with school."

Zelaya came aboard, working with Royer on *Dare To Know*, an 11-minute animated film for the Los Angeles Unified School District. The Bridges program sprang from this early work.

Zelaya now works in character design for Disney Television Animation's *Recess* television program, in development for the Fall season. It's a job he couldn't even dream of in high school. "If it wasn't for that one day, meeting Bruce, I wouldn't have done it," says Zelaya. "I thought that the competition would be too tough for me to be an artist. He helped give me the confidence in my art."

"It was a family kind of thing, gathering around and talking about our personal lives," says Zelaya, recalling Bridges. "That helped us grow and give each other personal criticism. That is one of the things that helped me grow completely. Before this, I was just a kid, when I came out I had a notion." ■

it's cutthroat, or even that you have to be on time, so we implement experiences that teach them how to do that."

Crain developed the "LifeSearch" program, which instructs students on keeping a focus on the future. "They are supposed to come to class as if it were five years from now and they tell us what they're doing," she explains. "They're actually supposed to have their business cards created. We had a young man do this about a year and a half ago and he said, 'I want to be at Disney, but I'm going to Film Roman first and I'll be there for a couple of years, but currently I'm at Disney.' And he had his card. Well, he actually was offered an opportunity to do a test at Disney, but before he could complete it, he was offered a job at Film Roman."

A strict code of discipline balances these life games. "We run [CRS] as if it were a professional studio," Royer says. "If students are late, they must call. If they're absent, they must call. They must hand in their assignments and they must be here five days a week. And they actually embrace that kind of discipline, because a lot of them haven't had it."

Bridges trainees must demonstrate a visible passion for animation before entering the program. "One thing I see about these kids is that they are so excited and into what they're doing that you almost want to hire them over someone else who has been out there much longer," says Dan Smith, director of artist recruitment and training for Walt Disney TV Animation. "You go to some colleges and the kids don't know what their motivation is, or which way they're going to go, but with these kids they know what

they want and they're excited about it, and when you put them to work, they work twice as hard as anybody else."

Despite the success—or perhaps because of it—CrainRoyer made changes in the program after the first year. With so many students from the initial class hired away before completing the 18-month program, Royer and Crain reorganized the operation into 12 months. The newly-dubbed Bridges Animation and Interactive Media Training program currently caters to older trainees, many of whom have been in the work force for years, but now hope to transition into the animation industry.

A large part of the reorganization centered around finance. While a grant from the Jimi Hendrix Foundation helped to offset costs during the first year of operation, the financial burden of maintaining the upscale Santa Monica location and studio resources, including 12 computer workstations, was shouldered by Crain and Royer themselves. As a result, a \$20,000

scheduled from 4:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.

The two-year-old Animation 500 has raised additional funds, as well as awareness, at Raleigh Studios in Hollywood. During these nine-hour

film centered around the theme, "Contributing to a Better World."

Royer and Crain see this as just the beginning of a defining year in their operation's history. Obtaining accredita-

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marathons teams of young people work side-by-side with top pros producing 20 seconds of animation per team. In last year's event, 300 artists created a total of 11 minutes of animation, rendered in colored pencil on paper, which was scanned into a digital capture system and played back at the end of the day.

Royer and Crain expect Animation 2000 to further raise the studio's profile, if not land it in the *Guinness Book of*

tion as a teaching facility stands as a goal for 1997. CRS also envisions a major expansion, with openings for 50 new artists this September, increasing to 75 next year, 100 in 1999 and 150 in 2000. Plans are also on the table to expand the program into other animation centers such as New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Toronto and Vancouver.

In addition, Royer plans a jump into production this year with a new division. "We have significant [creative] players for it already," he says, "and it's time for us to come out and start producing and making money with that aspect." Immediate possibilities include producing shorts and setting up the production studio as a work-for-hire creative packager, prepping layouts, character design and storyboards for animation by overseas studios.

In view of these expansion plans, neither partner seems overly concerned about a cyclical drop in industry activity. "We just learned that a major studio needs 200 people right now and they can't find the bodies to fill their positions, and that's just one," Crain says. "Even if some of the smaller houses are consumed by the larger houses, there's the Internet and cable and satellite TV, they need product too. So I think it's going to get even greater."

In the end, hard-core business concerns motivate CrainRoyer Studios less than its desire to give chances to young artists with what Royer calls "homeless skills"—kids with no place to park their talent. "This system is *not* the most logical from a business sense," Royer admits, "but we know that we're doing the right thing. And a lot of people that we're servicing are changing their lives, and changing ours at the same time." ■



A LASTING BRIDGE WITH STUDENTS: Crain and Royer with alumni Jose L. Zelaya, Edwin Aguilar, Mara Ancheta, Kevin Sirois, David Salvador and Francisco Rosales.

tuition was established for the 12-month program, though a student loan system was built in to take care of individual needs, with the provision that the trainees pay back the money once they start working. To allow for day jobs or other conflicts, classes are

World Records as the biggest toon-fest ever. To help insure the success of the event, CRS is offering a total of \$5,000 in cash prizes for the films judged best in various categories. Two hundred teams of high school and college age artists will each create a short animated



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