

## OREGON CARTOON INSTITUTE/MEL BLANC PROJECT 2011/GRANT NARRATIVE

Oregon Cartoon Institute was founded in 2007 by Anne Richardson and Dennis Nyback to raise awareness of Oregon's rich animation and cartooning history. OCI creates public events which celebrate figures and events from Oregon's animation and cartooning history, with the intent of laying the groundwork for a deeper understanding of Oregon's contributions to American pop culture and American film. OCI is fiscally sponsored by Oregon Cultural Heritage Commission, a 501 (c) (3) non profit organization.

Animation is an intensely collaborative, uniquely powerful form of filmmaking. Oregon has a track record of excellence in this field which sets it apart from virtually every other state. Currently Matt Groening, Brad Bird and Bill Plympton form a triumvirate at the top of three branches of American animation: television, studio, and art house animation. They hail from Portland, Corvallis and Oregon City respectively. Yet this clean sweep is not as surprising as you might think. Oregon's history of achievement in this field goes all the way back to the first days of animation.

Pinto Colvig, from Jacksonville, directed one of the first feature length animated films. George Bruns, from Sandy, was nominated for four Oscar for scores written for Disney animated features. The first top international film festival prize brought home by an Oregonian went to animator Ralph Wright, from Grants Pass. Mel Blanc, from Portland, contributed the the voice of Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig and Daffy Duck for almost 50 years. Marc Davis, graduate of Klamath Union High School, designed Bambi, Sleeping Beauty and Cruella Deville, before being tapped by Walt Disney to help design Disneyland.

These are achievements Oregon school children should know about.

Most Oregonians do not understand how unusual it is to live in a state - other than California -- which has a full fledged animation studio. Try to name one other state - other than New York or California - which is houses so many animators. You can't do it. Portland has made a large number of correct moves to nurture film artists, but one move it has not made is to internalize the self image of success. No other city has what we have. We are animation drenched, yet the self perception does not match the reality.

Oregon Cartoon Institute designs public programs which bring current Oregon artists before live audiences to serve as interpreters and guides to this neglected aspect of Oregon's cultural past and present. In so doing, we hope to prepare Oregonians of all ages, but especially Oregonian children, to think of themselves as coming from a state which has consistently produced very high achievers.

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Our first educational event was a three week animation screening series in 2007 at Disjecta, at which **Rose Bond, Jim Blashfield** and **Marilyn Zornado** appeared as guest speakers. The series culminated with a night at the Hollywood Theatre for which **Bill Plympton, Will Vinton, Joan Gratz, Joanna Priestly** and **Chel White** loaned us 35 mm prints.

Our second live event was **Bill Plympton Day** at the 2009 Oregon Sesquicentennial Film Festival. Bill Plympton introduced two programs of Oregon animation, one featuring work by historic Oregon figures, and the other works by his Portland contemporaries.

In 2007 OCI covered the **Platform International Animation Festival** with a [videoblog](#) which included interviews with Rose Bond, Jim Blashfield, Bill Plympton, and Will Vinton. These interviews, the joint effort of a team of seven, all volunteers, are still online.

In 2010 OCI created a [educational video](#) about the influence two Oregon artists, Carl Barks and Basil Wolverton, had on American underground cartoonist **Robert Crumb**. Filmmaker **Karl Lind** co-produced with OCI an interview with Crumb experts **Patrick Rosenkranz** and **Charles Boucher**. **Beverly Walton** of Portland Art Museum helped defray expenses with a donation. This video is still online at our website.

This year, Oregon Cartoon Institute is partnering with Oregon Jewish Museum, Oregon Historical Society, Oregon Cultural Heritage Commission and Ethos Music Center to create the [Mel Blanc Project](#), which will take place in Portland from May to August 2011. The project is designed to provide experiences which will allow Oregonians to learn about Mel Blanc, to consider his development as an artist, and to explore various aspects of the formative influence of his Portland roots.

Mel Blanc grew up in Portland, was educated in Portland, and received his first professional training and work opportunities right here in Portland. He conducted two parallel careers in Portland from 1927 to 1935: he was both a musician and a radio performer. He was eight years into a show business career when he moved to Los Angeles.

The list of cartoon characters voiced by Mel Blanc after he arrived in Hollywood includes Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Porky Pig, Sylvester the Cat, Tweety Bird and more. There is no voice artist in the history of animation who is held in higher esteem.

Oregon Jewish Museum is presenting a Mel Blanc exhibit and will house one of the four Mel Blanc Lectures coordinated by Oregon Cartoon Institute. The lectures illuminate Mel Blanc's Portland years from four angles: vaudeville, music, radio and his South Portland neighborhood. Oregon Historical Society will house one lecture. Oregon Jewish Museum will house one lecture. Ethos Music Center will house two lectures, as

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well as a weekend of live performances of an original composition celebrating Bugs Bunny created by OCI's artist-in-residence Heather Perkins. Heather Perkins will also be teaching an "animating with sound" class at Ethos Music School. The students in that class will get a guided tour of the importance of Mel Blanc' musical training, as he transferred those skills, as a voice artist, to radio and animation, using his voice as an instrument.

The Mel Blanc Lecture Series will be of interest to people curious about Portland history, about animation history, and about Mel Blanc's Portland years. We will be documenting the lectures, possibly in a radio broadcast or podcast, so they will be available for future reference when the Mel Blanc Project is over. In addition, we are creating a walking tour guide, "Your Guide to Mel Blanc, The Portland Years", which will be on sale throughout the project and available for purchase online after the project has concluded.

The Mel Blanc Project is an important milestone in the development of the Oregon Cartoon Institute. It is the first project we have undertaken for which we have conducted fundraising. It is the first project for which we have partnered with museums: the Oregon Historical Society and the Oregon Jewish Museum. It is the first project for which we will create materials which will be for sale after the project is concluded.

We will consider the Mel Blanc Project a success if we attract full houses for the lecture series, and for the concerts. We also will consider the project a success if it attracts media coverage which, by informing Oregonians about the separate elements of the project, will further the primary mission of OCI - that to raising awareness of Oregon's animation and cartooning history.

Besides the opportunity to educate Oregonians about the role Portland played in nurturing the talented Mel Blanc, the Oregon Cartoon Institute sees the Mel Blanc Project as an opportunity to build capacity as an emerging nonprofit. As we work alongside our partners to bring these programs to the public, we will be building relationships and learning how to run a successful non profit organization. We hope the Portland State School of Fine & Performing Arts will support this period of growth for Oregon Cartoon Institute by considering a partnership with the Mel Blanc Project.