

# WILL VINTON

*Portland animator Will Vinton talks about Go Karts, working without much hierarchy and winning an Oscar.*

**You grew up in McMinnville. What were your early influences? When did you first realize you wanted to be an animator?**

I had a really wide variety of influences from academics, team sports, and the arts. My Dad had photography and film gear that he let me use and we had a good basic shop in the basement where I made lots of things (Go Karts, surfboards, etc). I was a pretty good math and science student and went to UC Berkeley for the Physics program. But once I was there, I become most interested in architecture and experimental filmmaking. Those pursuits led to experimenting with stop-motion animation, which became my first love. It seemed to allow me to employ all of my interests in certain ways.

**When you are designing an animated character, what are you thinking about? What makes a great animated character?**

You have to know what the character's back story is, what his or her habits are, what their flaws are - everything! Once you have a sense of all that, the physical design by way of drawings or sculptures come much more easily. I like to start with a wide open, shot gun approach - being open to broad possibilities, seeking a range of design ideas from different illustrators / designers. The designs must try to respond to who the character is inside. Whether they are a hero or a villain, you want a very large segment of your audience to find them appealing to watch for an extended period of time - its really critical in making animated films enjoyable.

**Which of your many original animated characters are you closest to, or most proud of?**

That's a funny question that I get asked a lot. I always say that it is like asking "Which of your children is your favorite?" I guess if I'm pressed, I probably like best the newest or the ones I'm currently working on. But there's no question I have some old favorites like the "Noid" (from Dominoes Pizza commercials), the "Great Cognito" (short film), "Mark Twain" (from the feature THE ADVENTURES OF MARK TWAIN), Thurgood Stubbs (from The PJs tv series) and the M&Ms (commercials with "Red", "Yellow", "Green" etc). And I guess I have fond place in my heart for the California Raisins, especially doing some of their really great musical numbers.

**Why have you based your entire career out of Portland? Is there a unique Portland independent spirit?**

Yes, there really is a unique creative spirit in this area that I've always loved. Originally, after working and schooling in SF and LA, I returned to this area for the lifestyle. Initially, it seemed like a sacrifice in opportunity to live here. But I don't believe I could have built such a unique animation Studio as Will Vinton Studios in LA - it just wouldn't have happened. The creative teams we assembled here and the way of working collaboratively and without much hierarchy here were unique.

**Can you talk about winning an Oscar and what that was like?**

What can I say?! It was a dream - literally! After winning the Oscar for CLOSED MONDAYS, it seemed strangely like it was easy - and I thoroughly expected I'd win again each time I was nominated after that, but I didn't! [he was Nominated for four more Academy Awards since then] So, I'm still working to get that other "book-end".

**What do you think the future of animation holds?**

Animation has never been healthier! Except for an ebb in TV animation at the moment, there have never been more quality animated movies being made in all forms: stop motion, CG, claymation, even "cel" animation is back. The internet is full of animation. Computer games are using ever more sophisticated animated characters and action. Even live action films are using more and more animated "actors" instead of human actors for special effects and to keep humans out of dangerous situations. This trend will only continue in the future.

**You are teaching a class in Stop Motion Animation/Claymation this winter at the School of Film. What can your students look forward to?**

One must learn the art of character animation, not just how to manipulate the great tools and the programs we have now. That's what I intend to focus on in my new stop motion classes. I also believe character animation skills are a good thing to learn for a wide range of seemingly unrelated future occupations that involve creative uses of art and technology. There will be a lot of excellent opportunities for the next generation.

