

Happy my Way. Animating Diversity

Words by Glen Sheehan

IMG 01 / 02
Stills from *Dear Dad,
Love Maria* (Vince
Mascoli, 2009)

Thankfully the digital revolution that has democratised filmmaking over the past twenty years has meant that we are no longer solely reliant on major film studios. It's not all about Disney or Studio Ghibli. Or length.



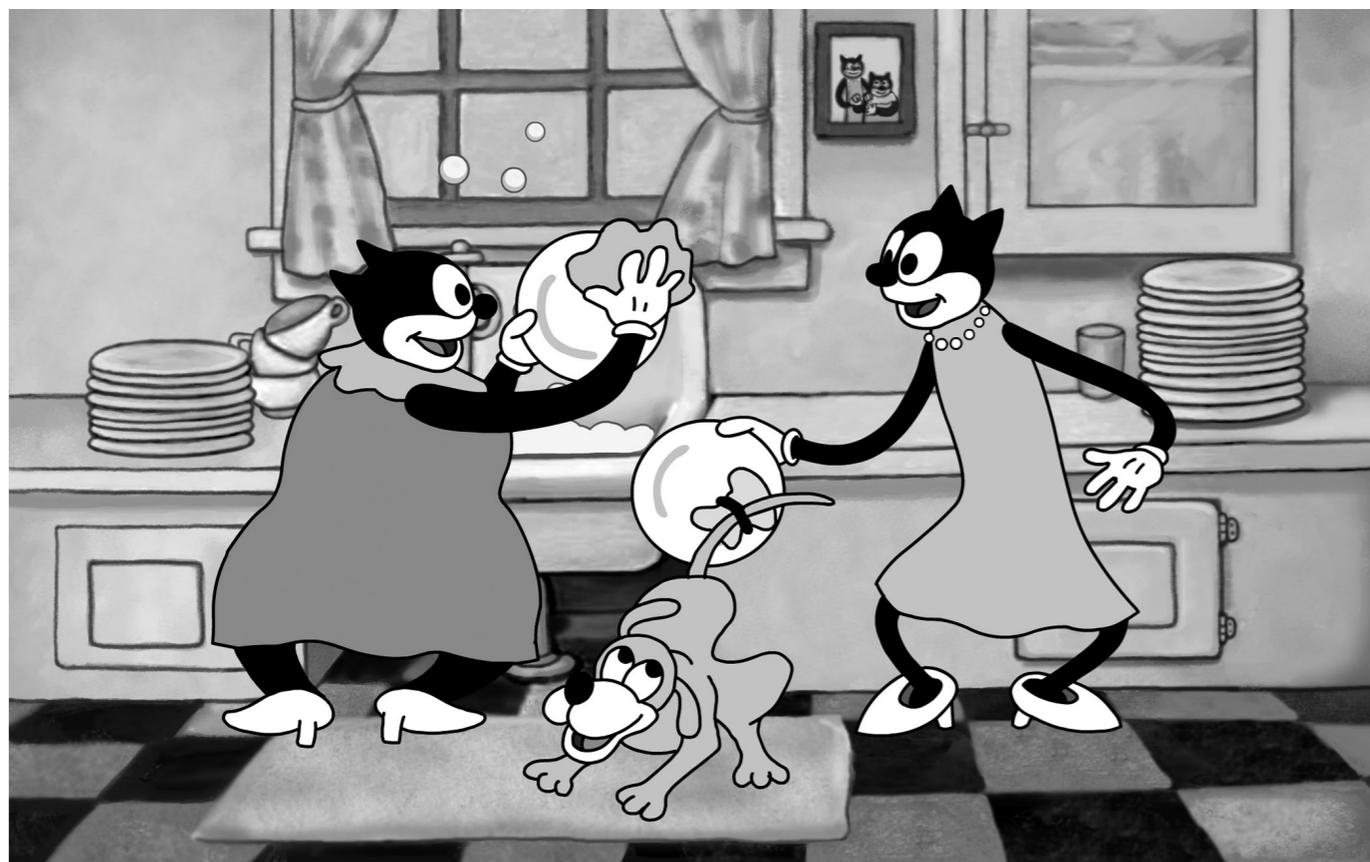
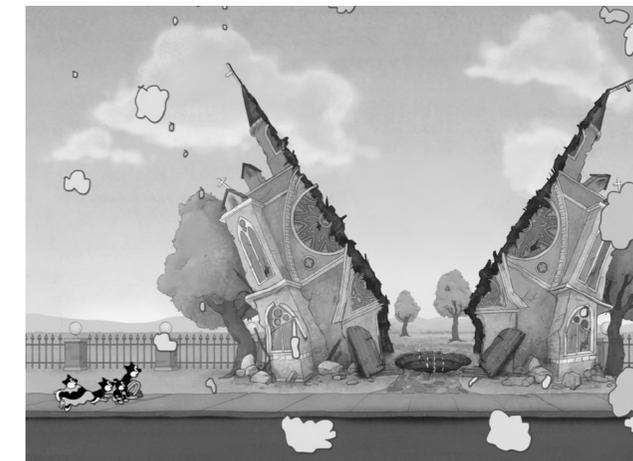
While online abuse towards women and the LGBT community as a whole remains problematic, what can be said is that the momentum against this issue is growing by the day. As such, the world of cinema is, albeit slowly, beginning to wake up and finally listen to its audience. The #OscarsSoWhite movement felt like a key moment in addressing the lack of true racial and sexual diversity shown on our cinema screens. The hashtag #GiveElsaA-Girlfriend started to trend heavily on Twitter earlier this year, as pressure grew on Disney to fully represent a LGBT relationship for the first time. In 2012, *ParaNorman* featured the first openly gay character in a mainstream animated film. There is also speculation that two women briefly seen together in *Finding Dory* (2016) are a gay couple, although neither Pixar nor Disney have confirmed this.

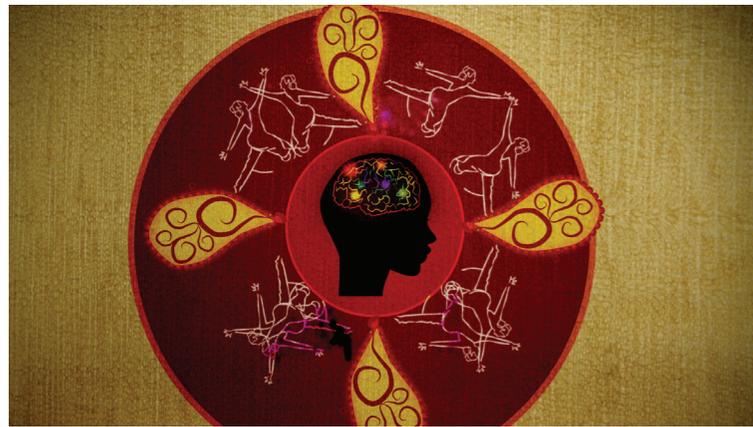
Thankfully the digital revolution that has democratised filmmaking over the past twenty years has meant that we are no longer solely reliant on major film studios. It's not all about Disney or Studio Ghibli. Or length. In 2007, the BAFTA Best Short Animation went to Ian Gouldstone's *guy101*, a film about a self-identified gay man's experience with "edgeplay." So, even though the golden age of feminist animation - worthwhile mentioning Vera Neubauer, Suzan Pitt and Nicole Van Goethem - came to an end in the mid-nineties, its spirit lives on new independent films with deliberately do-it-yourself aesthetic and socially aware subject matter. Below are four short animated films made by highly creative talent from across the globe. Each of them addresses issues affecting the LGBT community and will hopefully instigate discussion on a broader scale.

IMG 03 / 04 / 05
Stills from *Happy & Gay*
(Lorelei Pepi, 2014)

Lorelei Pepi's witty but thought-provoking ten minute animation, *Happy and Gay*, also serves as an ode to the history of animation, faithfully recreating the style of the Fleischer brothers, who were responsible for early incarnations of Popeye and Betty Boop. At the same time, it is a subversive take on issues that would never have seen the light of day in any form of mainstream entertainment during the 1930's.

In many ways this short film was a call to arms by Pepi, responding to a New York Times article retelling Pope John Paul II's outdated and ignorant views held toward the gay community. His aggressive language is represented by the church seen in the short as an institution struggling to modernise and understand the dynamics of same sex relationships. Despite





IMG 06 / 07 / 08
Stills from *Little Elephant*
(Kate Jessop, 2015)

IMG 09 / 10
Stills from *The Race*
(Soyoon Kim, 2015)

covering issues of homophobic abuse and violence, racism and societal exclusion, the tone always remains positive, nudging and winking at its audience while a Ragtime soundtrack flows delightfully along with the story.

A topic not nearly discussed enough within LGBT relationships are those having to overcome not only societal and family prejudice but also cultural complications. *Little Elephant* is a five-minute spoken letter from a British-born South Asian woman to her father, who is concerned about her coming out as gay.

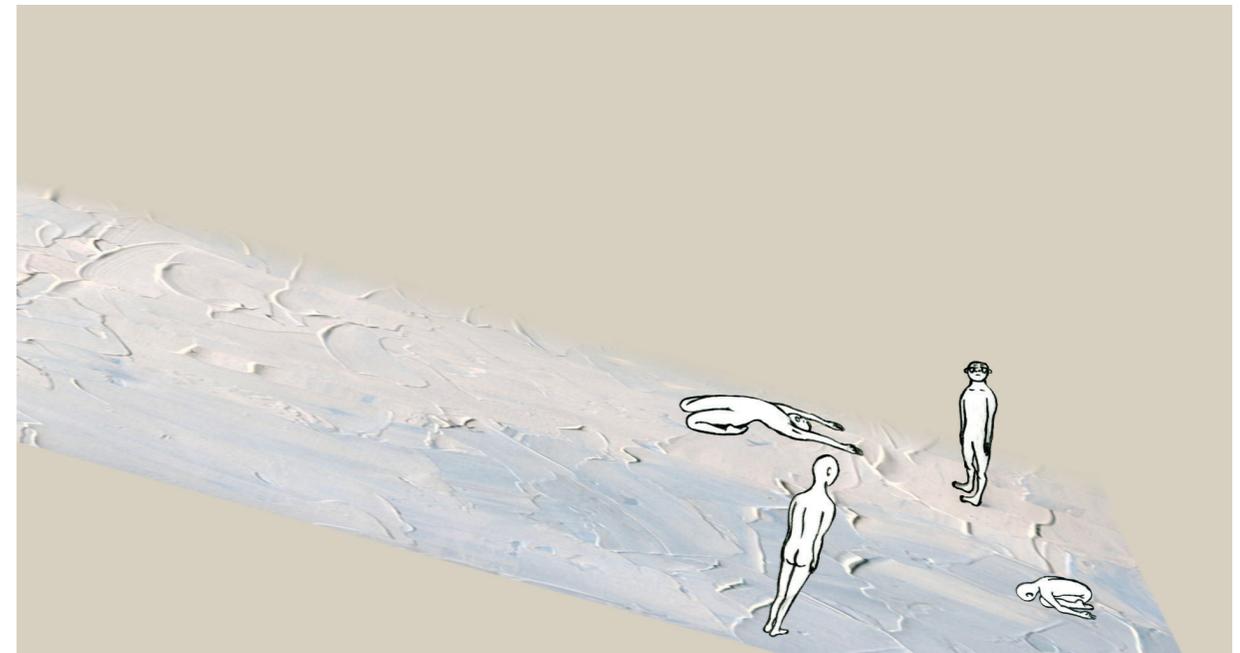
Kate Jessop's animation works through a combination of stop motion and 2D, a collage inspired by traditional Indian art using vibrant colours that enhances the simple and powerful message. The father is a proud man, eager to pass on his cultural heritage to his daughter but not willing to accept the East vs. West expectations that many younger second generation family members struggle with.

This is the first part of Jessop's *Love Works Duology* (supported using public funding by Arts Council England), the second part being *Chariot Riders* which also explores similar same-sex cultural themes. This committed filmmaker is also currently managing a cross-collaborative project between fourteen UK animators called *Queer Heroes*.

The Race remains open to interpretation, as its sparse artistic approach allows the time and space for us to impose our experiences and emotions into the four and a half minutes. Moving away from convention and a traditional narrative, Soyoon Kim's piece explores the fast changing pace of a society unwilling to wait for those struggling to adapt.

A static-heavy version of Bach's 'Air on a G String' plays on as four non-descript, hand drawn figures, slowly move into various balletic positions, set against a pale, minimalist backdrop. Time drifts on as the world around these figures gradually evolves into distortion, signifying the obstacles that must be overcome in the life that has been handed to them at birth.

Kim originally hails from Seoul, South Korea and as a female-assigned person draws on her own experiences for the audience to connect with. As such, this is a quietly affecting animated piece that permeates your thoughts sometime after the closing credits have ended.

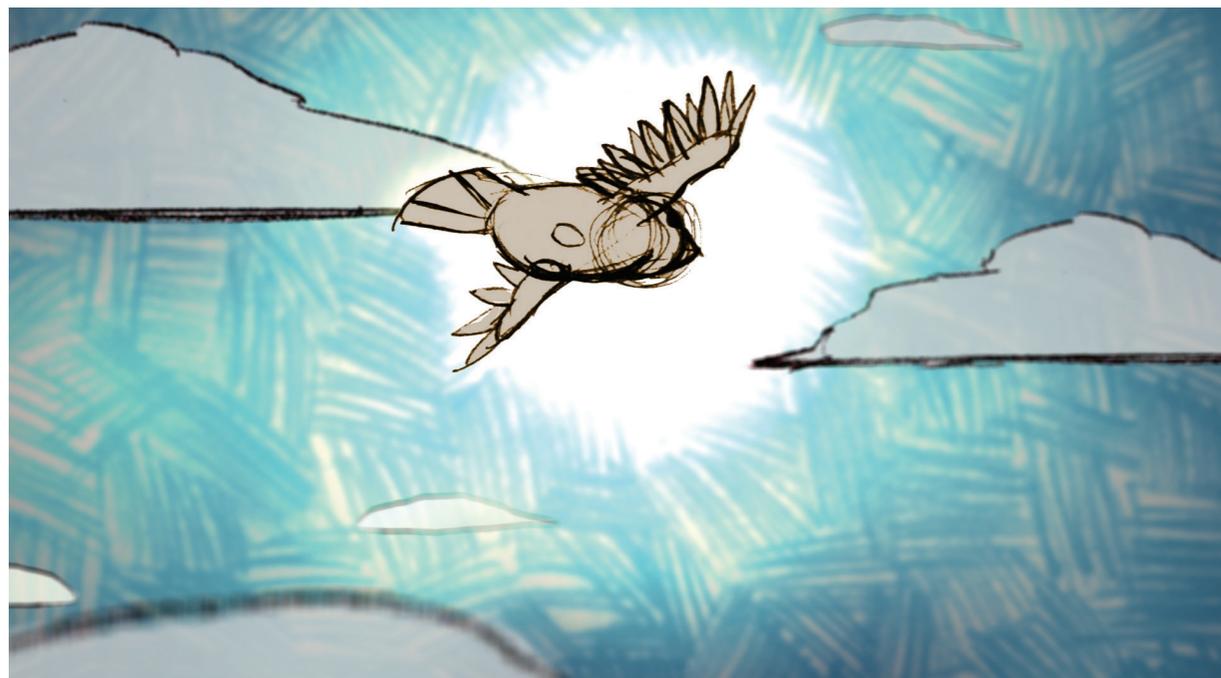


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Based in part on his own childhood and the experiences of others, Vince Mascoli's *Dear Dad, Love Maria* feels like a deeply personal story. As the title indicates, it is a letter from a daughter to her father, explaining the choices in her life and the sense of control she has finally achieved. Through narration, Maria recalls the ongoing battles with her father as she grew from a young boy into a grown woman, how her father felt he had lost a son, while her younger brother does not want a sister. She flicks through her childhood photo album and asks, "Your love for me - did all of that stay in those pictures?"

Evelyn Evelyn's melancholic, piano-led 'Sandy's Theme' plays on throughout, enhancing the sketched artistic style and accentuating the clear words spoken by Natalie Cake. The letter is being read on the eve of her reassignment surgery and while there is understandable frustration held toward her controlling home life, there is a level of understanding too, the father never demonised. Maria merely wants his acceptance and their bond strengthened once more. —

IMG 11
Still from *Dear Dad, Love Maria* (Vince Mascoli, 2009)



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