

Vancouver Independents

The animator's life is not all plasticine roses and cartoon rainbows. As with most art forms, animation does not provide the sort of large-scale employment opportunities that, say, working in the forest industry does.

And the amount of work involved in actually making an animated film can be staggering for any individual.

But there is hope, and in Vancouver, help, in the form of the Vancouver Society of Independent Animators (VSIA).

VSIA, a nonprofit organization established to support, promote and inspire the production of animation, celebrated its fifth birthday December 15.

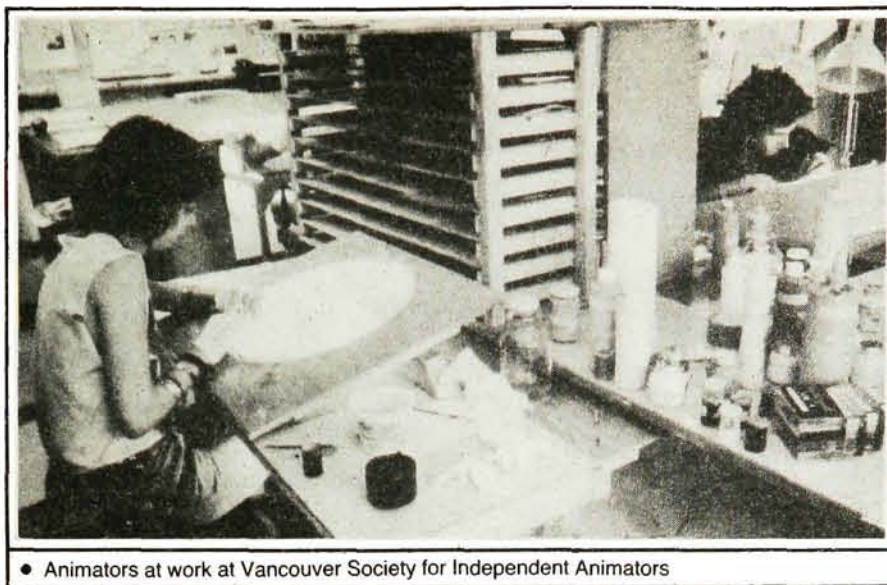
Housed next to a lumber mill in a light-industry district of the city, the society provides limited production facilities, equipment rentals, a projection facility, a resource library, a meeting hall, and publishes a regular magazine, *Pegbar*.

"No other studio in the world is set up like this," claims Linda Wilson, executive director and founding president of VSIA, "with these facilities for independent productions."



Certainly, you won't find many work places with quite the same *ambiance* — the walls, desks and shelves are crammed with painted cels, storyboards, clay models of three-headed creatures, assorted flip books ("the animator's business card"), and enough bizarre knick-knacks to stock a small novelty store. The place looks a lot like the bedroom of that weird-but-interesting kid you knew in high school who was always drawing on everything.

Which is not to say VSIA is all about playtime. "Animation is really a very technical art form and most productions don't reveal the amount of work that



• Animators at work at Vancouver Society for Independent Animators

goes into them," says Jack Picknell, CSIA chairman.

On the technical end of things, the society provides members with a Quick Action Recorder (a computerized means of pacing frames and previewing), an Oxbury animation stand with a 16mm camera, light tables, animation disks, editors, splicers, and various other tools and supplies.

And not only does the VSIA offer technical assistance, but its members often pool their abilities to help each other produce films. "Making non-commercial animation is a labour of love," Picknell says. "It can take years to complete a film. And there's an incredible amount of pre-planning involved; there has to be, considering the time that gets put into a project."

Although most of the society's approximately 80 members are from Vancouver, some are from as far away as Holland, Japan and California.

The membership includes such people as Marv Newland, Danny Antonucci, and Dutch animator Paul Driesen, who worked with Linda Wilson at the VSIA for six months in early 1986 to produce two films, *Train Gang* and *Getting There*, for Expo 86.

A more recent VSIA success is *Beat*, an animated film made by Rod Filbrandt and Michael Grimshaw, two Vancouver cartoonists who collaborated on this Jazz-period piece. *Beat* premiered at the 1987 Vancouver International Film Festival in the Commonwealth animation program.

Some support for *Beat* came from the local National Film Board office in the form of camera, work-printing and pro-

cessing. Besides services, the NFB also provides the society with a grant, says Sven-Erik Eriksen, the Technical and Animation producer for the NFB in Vancouver.

Eriksen is not presently a member of the VSIA, although he was on its board for two years. "I resigned because I felt I had done all I could there. I also felt the membership wasn't getting involved enough in running the place."

The problems he sees with the operation of the VSIA are caused by inexperience and the representation in the society of basically only one faction of the local animation community. "Still, I do support them and think that in the long run they do good things," he says.

Another of the VSIA's functions is to promote awareness and appreciation of the art of animation. Last September, they combined this endeavour with a fundraising benefit called "Bartoonz" at Graceland, a Vancouver club. "We had some bands to draw people in," says Picknell, "then we shoved animation down their throats. They loved it and we plan to do it again."

In fact, the evening was successful enough to cover one-third the cost of their new camera stand.

The society has also sponsored seminars and workshops with such animators as Heikki Paakkanen (*The Last Channel*), from Finland, Bruno Bozzetto (*Bolero, Self Service*), from Italy; and Joan C. Gratz from Will Vinton Productions of Oregon (who produced the well-known "claymation" commercial for California raisins).

Benefits, studio fees, membership dues and the NFB, along with Canada Council and City of Vancouver grants keep VSIA chugging along. "But we're always looking for willing corporate sponsors," Picknell says.

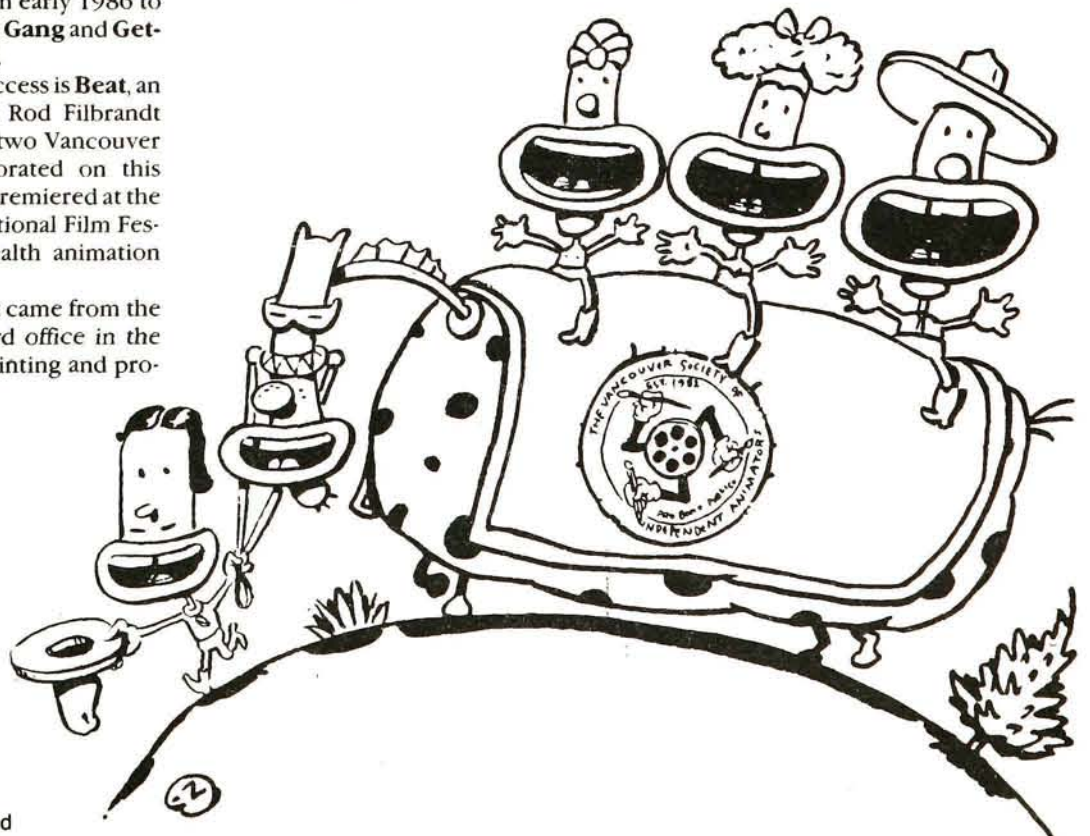
Generally, financial problems are common to independent animators, according to Wilson. "One of the big problems is distribution — marketing the productions," she says. "A lot of theatres are reluctant to show shorts; it interferes with their popcorn sales."

The most these filmmakers can hope for is to have their work chosen for animation festivals such as those held in Annecy, France; Zagreb, Yugoslavia; and Hiroshima, Japan. Or, they might be selected for one of the major touring animation packages, such as the one put together by Spike & Mike — Mellow Manor Productions — from California.

Even so, the financial future of independent animators is grim, and with the competition from cheap sources of animation in Korea and Japan, it's getting worse.

But that's what the VSIA is there for — to support animators and their projects. "If you've got a good idea for a film, you can get it done," says Picknell. "With the VSIA there are ways."

Calvin Wharton



cartoon: Marv Newland