



Screen Time Images' Sean McKee Restores Holiday Classic Cartoons and TV Show, and Interviewed on WGN Superstation (The CW)

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As we get older, childhood memories deteriorate and fade, as do the TV shows we watched as kids. Chicago Superstation WGN (The CW), and the Museum of Broadcast Communications (MBC) work together to keep those memories alive each year during the holiday season. The classic 2 ½ minute cartoons “Hardrock, Coco and Joe”, “Frosty The Snowman”, “Suzy Snowflake” and “Peter Cottontail” have been showing for 50 years every Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve. Over the last few years, the cartoons have been showing as part of a 2 hour collection entitled “Bozo, Gar & Ray”, which reminisces on the heyday of children’s entertainment with Bozo the Clown, Garfield Goose, and Ray Rayner.

The “song cartoonettes” featured music by Hill and Range Songs, with “Hardrock, Coco and Joe” and “Suzy Snowflake” created by Centaur Productions, which was established in the 1950s by Wah Ming Chang, a former Disney Sculptor who created the model of Pinocchio, and George Pal, a producer and Academy Award nominee. “Frosty The Snowman” and “Peter Cottontail” were produced by UPA (United Productions of America), a studio comprised of animation veterans with a new approach to cartoons, which focused on contemporary design and stylized movement (which ushered in the “limited animation” associated with TV cartoons). UPA’s most famous cinematic creations were the “Dick Tracy” cartoons, “Mr. Magoo” and “Gerald McBoing Boing”.

When it came time to restore the aging cartoons, WGN and the MBC sought out the experience of restoration experts Screen Time Images, based in Chicago for over 11 years. Run by Sean McKee, the company has extensive experience working on cartoons, which bring unique requirements to film restoration not present in live action work.

Besides having done work for Disney, they have restored treasured classics like “Popeye the Sailor”, the “Superman” cartoon serial, “The Archies”, “Davey & Goliath” and many early Japanese anime series.

Screen Time Images’ main tool of choice is da Vinci Systems’ Revival Digital film restoration system, the first company in the world to use the system 8 years ago, and McKee has worked closely with da Vinci to further its development. The system works in conjunction with their Millennium 4K film scanner, da Vinci color corrector, Autodesk Smoke and Flame systems with a custom SAN.

According to McKee, “The negatives for these cartoons had long since been lost, so we pieced together new masters from the only remaining 16mm prints available, by scanning them at 2K. The footage received a scene-by-scene semi-automated process to take care of small dirt. Animation, unlike live action material, does not always have 24 unique frames of motion per second. Many times there are identical consecutive frames, and this can confuse other systems. But together with a critical eye, the Revival system handled this with ease. We went through frame by frame and manually took out the larger defects, splices, scratches, etc. The interactive scratch removal tool and splice repair tools were invaluable for this job.”

Audio was also restored, removing hiss, clicks and crackle via dedicated Cedar Audio restoration hardware, along with Pro Tools and a Neve Libra console. Several masters were created, HD D5, SD and SD with logo bugs, which were delivered and aired nationally on WGN during the Thanksgiving broadcast of the “Bozo, Gar & Ray” show. A 12-minute DVD of the four cartoons was made available by the Museum of Broadcast Communications (www.museum.tv).

The day before the broadcast, the MBC was on WGN discussing the restoration, and the response to the newly created masters was overwhelmingly positive. As a result, in a last minute decision, WGN contacted Screen Time Images to take the entire two hour “Bozo, Gar and Ray” show and improve its look as well. The company was given two days to do everything they could, in time for the station to prepare the show for broadcast on their servers on Christmas Eve.

McKee continues, “We had to prioritize what was possible to accomplish in a tight deadline. With the cartoons, we had several weeks to make 12 minutes look perfect, and now were faced with the challenge of making two hours look as good as possible in two days. The show was made up of clips compiled from a 50 year history of children’s television on WGN, and contained sources that originated on kinescope, two-inch quad, one-inch, ¾ inch and even VHS. We decided that a scene-by-scene color correction with our da Vinci color corrector provided the fastest and most noticeable benefit, and found that much of the footage had leaned towards a greenish hue, making the people look quite unnatural. After bringing back the proper skin tones and overall balance, we then went back to Revival and applied an overall setting to help eliminate inherent video noise and dropouts. The results were impressive.”

This new version was then nationally aired at night on Christmas Eve. Prior to the airing, McKee appeared in an interview on the WGN morning news to discuss the work that was done, with entertainment host Dean Richards (also the host of the “Bozo, Gar and Ray” show). Although some of the discussion was technical in nature, a variety of before and after clips were shown to the audience, which helped to easily illustrate the dramatic improvements that were achieved. McKee then discussed the process in more detail later that afternoon in an interview on WGN radio.

A clip of the TV interview is available in several high-quality streaming Quicktime sizes:

www.screentimeimages.com/video/sti-wgn-small.mov OR

www.screentimeimages.com/video/sti-wgn-large.mov.

While the four cartoons are available on DVD, the “Bozo, Gar and Ray” show is only available for viewing during the two yearly broadcasts during Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve.

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