

BreakThru Films

Awards galore

BreakThru Films wins Oscar for best animated short film and other top honors for *Peter and the Wolf*, created using Adobe® video software



When Sergei Prokofiev penned the story and musical score for *Peter and the Wolf* in 1936, he could scarcely have imagined that his children's tale and its accompanying music would become a worldwide legend. But Prokofiev's story of the irreverent Peter has resonated deeply with more than five generations of children, enchanted by its power and sense of fun, and the story's musical composition is arguably the most popular piece of classical music ever orchestrated for children.

Now, an animated short film created by a global team of artists using Adobe video software—Adobe After Effects®, Adobe Premiere® Pro, and Adobe Photoshop®—won the 2008 Oscar for best animated short film, carrying on the tradition of exceptional creative endeavors based on the enduring children's fable.



Adobe Premiere Pro enabled BreakThru Films to create its award-winning animated short, *Peter and The Wolf*, while keeping costs for editing and production to a minimum. The film combines old-world stop-motion animation techniques and the latest technologies for post-production.



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producer and line producer,
Peter and the Wolf

“We had a shoestring budget for *Peter and the Wolf*, yet we were able to create a world-class animated film,” says Producer and Line Producer Alan Dewhurst. “Adobe software, especially Adobe Premiere Pro, enabled us to create an award-winning animated short, while keeping our costs for editing and production to a minimum. We had extensive experience using Adobe software, and we knew that it could accomplish the massive amount of work this film would require.”

The Oscar is not the film’s only success to date. *Peter and The Wolf* sold out the Royal Albert Hall for its world premiere, accompanied live by the Philharmonia Orchestra. It was nominated for a Bafta and has also won a Montreux Rose d’Or; the Annecy Cristal and Prix du Public; the Pulcinella award for best European program; and the British Animation Award for Best TV Special.

Combining old and new techniques

London-based BreakThru Films co-produced *Peter and The Wolf* with Se-ma-for Studios in Poland. The film was directed by Suzie Templeton and jointly produced by Dewhurst and Hugh Welchman.

Peter and The Wolf combines old-world stop-motion animation techniques and the latest technologies for post-production, with London’s renowned Philharmonia Orchestra performing the soundtrack. Distinctive in its lack of any dialogue or narration, the film unfolds purely in images and sound, interrupted by periods of silence. The film tells the story of Peter who slips the guard of his haunted, over-protective grandfather and, with a little help from a crazy bird and dreamy duck (and none whatsoever from a fat, lascivious cat and two hooligan hunters), outsmarts a wolf. “The film’s sensibility is one of poetic naturalism. We used stop-frame models to give us the tactility and emotional immediacy that you don’t get with techniques like CGI,” says Dewhurst.



BreakThru artists wrote the script that would guide the action and began drawing the storyboards and initial design concepts for the characters, finessing them using Adobe Photoshop software. Adobe Premiere Pro and Autodesk Maya 3D were then used to create a CG previsualization of the entire film, blocking out all of the actions and camera positions.

At BreakThru in London, artists wrote the script that would guide the action and began drawing the storyboards and initial design concepts for the characters, finessing them using Adobe Photoshop software. The team then used Adobe Premiere Pro and Autodesk Maya 3D software to create a computer-generated (CG) previsualization of the entire film, blocking out all of the actions and camera positions.

Each progressive edit in Adobe Premiere Pro enabled artists to explore and hone the choreography of the camera positions and rough approximations of the characters in actual space—an important step because the physical performance of the characters had to be synchronized precisely with the music. “The process was more like dance than drama,” explains Dewhurst. “We built rough approximations of the characters and camera positions in order to get the timing and choreography sorted out first. Adobe Premiere Pro was very friendly in terms of finessing the timing and playing with sound.”

Tapping talent from around the world

BreakThru then moved the project to Se-ma-for Studios in Poland, known for classic puppet animation. There, artists began designing the

characters in earnest. Using photographic references and other sources of inspiration, they sculpted the characters and generated molds and casts that were used to create puppets. Soon each character emerged as a puppet with highly realistic qualities. For the grandfather character, for instance, artists used silicon skin that allowed them to add wrinkles and age spots. They dressed the human characters in handmade clothing and applied fur and feathers to the animals.

Meanwhile, artists created sets—often using real materials like small trees and grasses taken from the forest. The team then began shooting the puppets on set, and, in some instances, against a blue screen. As production progressed, artists continuously used Adobe Premiere Pro to edit each sequence and then fine-tuned the placement of characters and adjusted individual shots as necessary. “The cuts all stayed live throughout the film shoot. We created shots, dropped them into Adobe Premiere Pro, then tweaked and adjusted each edit repeatedly,” says Dewhurst. “I remember one shot with 125 frames had 100 edits. Throughout the project, the friendliness of Adobe Premiere Pro was exceptional.”

Company

BreakThru Films

London, England

www.breakthrufilms.co.uk

Challenges

- Complete Oscar-winning short animated film on a shoestring budget
- Create a sense of poetic naturalism
- Transform designs into realistic puppets
- Synchronize puppet actions precisely to Prokofiev’s music
- Edit and re-edit shots to fine-tune characters’ actions
- Remove rigging and clean up on-set materials from shot to shot

Solution

- Design characters using Adobe Photoshop software
- Create a computer-generated (CG) previsualization of the entire film using Adobe Premiere Pro and Autodesk Maya
- Synchronize character actions with music using Adobe Premiere Pro
- Continuously edit and re-edit sequences to maximize precision
- Remove rigging and clean up shots with Adobe After Effects

Benefits

- Awarded 2008 Oscar for best animated short film
- Garnered Montreux Rose d’Or; the Anecy Cristal and Prix du Public; the Pulcinella award for best European program; and the British Animation Award for Best TV Special
- Kept production costs low
- Created a sense of tactility and emotional immediacy
- Precisely timed character actions to music
- Efficiently cleaned up hundreds of shots

Toolkit

- Adobe Production Studio. Components used include:
 - Adobe After Effects
 - Adobe Photoshop
 - Adobe Premiere Pro
- PC computers running Microsoft® Windows®
- Mac computers running Mac OS X

Each progressive edit of the *Peter and The Wolf* film in Adobe Premiere Pro let artists explore and hone the choreography of the camera positions and rough approximations of the characters in actual space—an important step because the physical performance of the characters had to be synchronized precisely with the music score. As production progressed, artists continuously used Adobe Premiere Pro to edit each sequence and then fine-tuned the placement of characters and adjusted individual shots as necessary.



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Moving into digital post

With 420 shots created altogether, the project moved into digital postproduction. When the team started out, they assumed they might need digital post on only about 15% of shots, but as it turned out, they needed post on more than 90% of the shots. More rigging than expected was required, and it was impossible to conceal all of the rigs behind the characters. And, because the natural materials used in sets—trees, grasses, and weeds—were shot in multiple camera passes, they appeared to jump around from shot to shot. For rig removal and extensive cleanup of materials used in sets, artists used Adobe After Effects.

“After Effects provided an efficient, fast pipeline for cleanup on hundreds of shots,” says Dewhurst. With the rough cut complete, the team moved to another facility to create an HD version of the film.

A life of its own

Completed in 2006, *Peter and the Wolf* remains true to Prokofiev’s original music and story, but has developed its own life. It works on many levels for both children and adults; guiding us to explore our fear and fascination with a wild beast and witnessing a young boy discover his own strength and integrity.

When the filmmakers create their next masterpiece, Dewhurst is confident that Adobe software will play a central role. “Adobe genuinely understands filmmakers,” says Dewhurst. “As a company, Adobe wants to help, and delivers the tools we need to make our projects successful.”



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