mormonartist

Issue 2

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mormonartist

covering the Latter-day Saint arts world

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See the submission guidelines
on page v.

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editor's**note**

First off, thank you for the overwhelmingly positive support you've all showered on Mormon Artist. It makes a world of difference. In the past two months since Issue 1 came out, we've had hundreds and hundreds of people read the magazine and almost six hundred people have joined the Facebook group—which isn't bad for a small upstart magazine that popped up out of nowhere. We've also become part of a blog called The Red Brick Store *(http://theredbrickstore.com)*, an exciting new collaboration among the editors of Mormon magazines and journals.

And here we are on our second issue. Originally we were planning to focus on the print edition of the magazine, but over the past month it has become clear that the only way to make that viable is with a lot of money, and that's something we don't have and probably won't for a long, long time. So we've shifted our focus to the web edition (which is what almost everyone was reading anyway). We've redesigned our website to make the web experience a first-class citizen and are looking forward to what will be happening on that front in the future. Don't worry, we'll still offer a PDF of every issue, since about half of you are reading it that way. We'll also continue to make issues available for print on demand via MagCloud. (But since we're focusing on the web and are no longer constrained to keep the page count down, the MagCloud editions will get more expensive. Consider them to be the deluxe, premium package and then the bite won't be as bad.)

A minor change that will have lasting repercussions is the splitting of the magazine into sections. They were unofficially there in the first issue, but we've made them overt now: Literature, Visual Arts, Music, and Film & Theatre, with an occasional Miscellanea sprouting up from issue to issue when warranted. We're currently finding section editors to maintain these.

As part of this division into sections, we're also expanding our content base beyond just interviews. In this issue we've got some photographs by Scott Jarvie and a short play by J. Scott Bronson, and in future issues we'll include more artwork of all kinds, along with articles and essays and other types of content. Interviews will continue to be the main course, but we want to add more variety.

And to get there, we're now opening the magazine to submissions. We're excited. (See the facing page for all the details.)

The next big step is international outreach. As I mentioned in my note in Issue 1, there are many LDS artists throughout the world but hardly anyone knows who they are. Let's change that. While we'll still continue to interview artists in the States, of course, I want to start featuring several international artists in each issue. If you know of any in your ward or from your mission or what have you, send us an email and let us know.

Other plans include contests, a database of places Mormon artists can submit their work to, and an artist directory on the website where artists can add their name, the types of work they do, and a link to their website. (We contemplated making a full-blown social network but decided against that since there are plenty of those already out there that do the job just fine, and people don't need yet another site to check each day.)

If you want to help the magazine, the most important thing you can do right now is spread the word. Give people the URL *(mormonartist.net)*. Invite them to the Facebook group (search for "Mormon Artist"). And also be sure to let people know we're now looking for submissions.

Again, thanks for your support. We appreciate it.

—Benjamin Crowder

We're interested in your feedback on this issue. Let us know what you liked and what you didn't—and if you know anyone we should interview for a future issue, let us know.

Letters to the editor may be sent to editor@mormonartist.net

submissionguidelines

Types of work we're looking for:

- *Personal essays*
- *Poetry*
- *Short stories*
- *Short plays*
- *Paintings*
- *Illustrations*
- *Photographs*

(This list will grow, and the submission guidelines will get more refined over time, but we want to keep it simple for now while we work everything out.)

Work in any genre is fine as long as it's appropriate for an LDS audience. It also goes without saying that anything you submit must be your own original work. (Simultaneous submissions and previously published work are both fine.)

All submissions should be sent via email to editor@mormonartist.net. One submission per email, please.

Literary submissions: in the body of the email, put your name, the title of the piece, the genre, and a short one-paragraph synopsis. Attach your submission as a Word or PDF file.

Visual arts submissions: in the body of the email, put your name, the title of the piece, and the medium. Attach your submission as a JPEG file.

Angela Hallstrom

Angela Hallstrom is a writer whose first novel, Bound on Earth, *was published in February. She is also the editor of* Irreantum *and teaches at BYU. Interviewed Sept. 24, 2008. Website:* ***angelahallstrom.com***

How did you get started with writing?

I wrote off and on throughout my childhood and adolescence, but my first love was always reading. I didn't seriously consider trying to write fiction until my early adulthood. I'd written a few short stories and started experimenting with a couple of since-discarded novels when I moved to Minnesota in 1998. While there, I enrolled in the liberal studies program at Hamline University, where I pursued an MFA in fiction. I owe a lot to my experience at Hamline and feel that's where I really found my voice.

Although some will argue that you can't "teach" writing—and to a certain extent I understand that sentiment—my experience as a student of writing is what pushed me from dabbling in writing as a hobby to committing myself more seriously to the craft. It's when I decided to try to be a "writer" instead of a "person who sometimes writes."

Describe your writing process. Where do you write? When? For how long?

I wish I could say that I'm a disciplined writer who sits down at her computer at the same time every day, but I'm a lot more likely to write in fits and starts. When I'm in the middle of a project that's humming along, I can't wait to sit down and write, write, write. But I also find myself stuck pretty regularly—grinding away in the wrong gear—and to be honest, those days it's hard to face the blinking cursor. Juggling motherhood and teaching and writing continues to be a challenge, but it's a challenge I'm committed to taking up because writing has become such an important part of my life.

How do you balance writing and motherhood?

It's tricky. I have four kids and my oldest three are all school age, but my youngest is nineteen months old,

so writing while a toddler is trucking around in roam-and-destroy mode can be challenging. It's difficult for me to write fiction unless things are quiet and I have limited distractions, so I try to write while my youngest naps or at night after the kids have gone to bed. Right now my job as a mom is the most important and demanding part of my day, so I have to fit writing into the nooks and crannies. I am hopeful (very hopeful!) that once my youngest is a little older, I'll have a bit more quiet time.

How did *Bound on Earth* come to be? What was it like writing it?

Bound on Earth began as a short story, "Trying," about a college student named Marnie. When I wrote that story, I started asking questions about the other members of Marnie's family: her mother, father, sisters. I wondered what made them tick. When I wrote another short story called "Thanksgiving," the Palmer family really came alive. I found I couldn't leave them alone.

Writing *Bound on Earth* was a lot of fun. A lot of work, but a lot of fun. It was the first time I'd ever attempted writing an extended work of fiction, and I enjoyed walking around with the Palmers in the back of my mind, nudging me along, whispering their secrets.

How long did it take?

In total, the novel took about five years to write. And yes, I'm hoping that my next one won't take quite that long.

What has the reception been like so far?

So far, *Bound on Earth's* reception has been quite positive. My book's sales have been relatively small when compared with sales numbers for mainstream fiction, or even mainstream LDS fiction (meaning novels published by the two or three larger LDS publishing companies). But given the expectations for the book's market, I think that my publishing company, Parables, has been pleased. Sales numbers aside, I've loved interacting with individual readers, and I've particularly enjoyed attending local book clubs and talking about the book in person.

How many drafts? Do you rewrite as you go along or after each draft?

I'm a writer who *must* revise in order to figure out what I'm trying to say. Sometimes this takes two or three drafts (when I'm lucky); sometimes it takes seven or eight or more. I rarely begin projects with outlines or clearly-defined plot trajectories. I've tried it, but it almost always hems me in. Instead, I have a character, or a situation, or just the glimmer of an idea, and it takes a lot of writing and a number of wrong turns before I figure out what the piece wants to be.

Bound on Earth began during my MFA program, and I did a lot of revising: some stories started out as class assignments, then were revised for my thesis, then were revised again for individual publication, then were revised again for inclusion in the book.

How did you get feedback over those five years?

I had a lot of excellent feedback in school, of course, but I also got feedback from my husband and friends and editors of journals like *Irreantum* and *Dialogue,* and even Utah Arts Council judges. Although I didn't end up taking each individual suggestion, all the feedback I received was helpful in its own way.

Do you belong to a writer's group?

Since moving back to Utah in January of 2006, I've belonged to an excellent writers group with the poet and fiction writer Darlene Young; the memoirist and editor of Segullah, Kathy Soper; and the poet, fiction and children's book writer Sharlee Glenn. All three of these women are insightful, experienced writers and editors—and are also kind and wonderful people—and I'm blessed to have them in my life. Now that *Bound on Earth* is behind me and I'm trying to start some new projects, I'm so glad to have them around to alternately kick me in the behind and pat me on the head.

Tell us about publishing with Parables—what led you to them in the first place? What has the experience been like?

I was looking for a publishing company brave enough to publish LDS literary fiction. There aren't many of those companies around, and those that do crop up have a tough time staying in business. *Bound on Earth* had a particularly bumpy path to publication: a couple of small LDS publishers had expressed interest but then had to back out (one went out of business and the other's immediate needs changed), so I was thrilled when Parables decided to take a chance on the book.

Since this is my first novel, I don't have anything with which to compare my experience, but I feel very

lucky to have had Beth Bentley as my editor. She has a fantastic eye. I also know that I enjoyed a lot of one-on-one attention that I wouldn't have received with a larger publisher. Of course, small publishers like Parables don't have a lot of money for publicity, and distribution can be difficult. It's particularly hard to get LDS fiction into LDS bookstores if it doesn't come from one of the big three publishers. (Strangely—or perhaps not-so-strangely—it was much easier to get the book into Barnes and Noble.) The BYU Bookstore has been great to work with, though, and the novel has been picked up by Granite Distribution, so I'm hopeful that we'll see Bound on Earth in more LDS bookstores soon.

Since Parables doesn't have a lot of money for publicity, what have you done to advertise the book? How has that been?

I've been pretty proactive as far as marketing the book is concerned. The most beneficial way for me to publicize has been through the Internet—the Bloggernacle, specifically. Parables provided a number of review copies of the novel, and I was lucky enough to have some good online reviews on blogs and other Web sites that served my target audience. Even though I had some interviews and reviews in mainstream publications (like the *Salt Lake Tribune* and *In Utah This Week),* the reviews that translated into sales were from blogs, especially from popular individual bloggers like Provo-based Courtney Kendrick, who blogs at "C Jane Enjoy It!"

I've also had some success in offering to attend book clubs along the Wasatch Front. I know that word of mouth can be the best (and cheapest!) marketing around, and women in book clubs are always looking for new novels to read. It's been a lot of fun to attend these book clubs and discuss my writing process, and the Palmer family, and the ways that readers' real lives intersect with the fictional lives in the novel.

Overall, the novel hasn't had huge sales—nothing on par with what you'd expect from a Deseret Book or Covenant bestseller—but given the novel's niche audience and lack of marketing money, both Parables and I have been very pleased with how well things have gone thus far. But I never wrote the book expecting to earn money. I was interested in telling this family's story, and I still feel incredibly lucky that the book is out there in the world, and that people are reading it.

You teach writing at Salt Lake Community College, right? How has that affected you as a writer?

I've been a student or teacher of English and writing most of my adult life. I taught high school English for five years, then took five more years to earn my MFA, then started teaching part-time at local colleges as soon as I graduated. I love school—everything about it. The "Back to School" displays at Target get my blood pumping every year, no fail. I'll buy myself a pack of new sharpened pencils even if I don't need them, mainly for the smell.

I just started teaching creative writing for BYU (hooray!). This is my first opportunity to teach creative writing, rather than composition or literature, and I'm enjoying it very much. This semester, and next, I'll be at the BYU Salt Lake Center, but I look forward to teaching at the Provo campus too, once my youngest gets a little older.

ANGELA HALLSTROM

BOUND ON EARTH

A Novel

My experiences as both a student and as a teacher have had a profound effect on my writing. I learn best when I'm surrounded by others—particularly others who are smarter and more imaginative than I am—so school serves an important creative function for me. It inspires me, spurs me on, helps me be better and more interesting than I would otherwise be. And this happens when I'm functioning as a teacher just as often as when I'm functioning as a student.

Who are your influences, both in literature and in other media?

Whenever I read Marilynne Robinson (*Housekeeping, Gilead),* it makes me grateful that such amazing talent is thriving in this world, and a little jealous that I will never be as good as she is. I also love Michael Cunningham, Alice Munro, Raymond Carver, Toni Morrison, Barbara Kingsolver, Richard Ford, Lorrie Moore. Oh, and Anne Tyler. I grew up stealing my mom's Anne Tyler books, and I think my early exposure to her work affects me still. I read a lot of my dad's Stephen King as a teenager too and often wonder if (and how) his influence is expressing itself. Although *Bound on Earth* is not a good example of this, I've always been interested in the supernatural, and I'm delving into some of those themes in my next novel.

I'm a little ashamed to say I like television, only because so many of my artistically-inclined friends have absolutely no interest in TV whatsoever, so it probably speaks to my less-refined nature. But I love "Lost" and "30 Rock" and "The Office," and I'll admit to watching the occasional "Project Runway" or "So You Think You Can Dance." None of these shows has had much of an effect on me artistically, I must admit—unless you count staying up late and watching them when I should be writing instead!

And next to reading, which will always be my first love, going to the movies with my husband is one of my favorite things to do. I suppose I just love a good story, no matter the medium.

What are you working on now?

I think I will continue writing for or about Mormons in one capacity or another, but my next novel is for a general audience and doesn't have any Mormon characters. At least not for now. I am in the very early stages and I'm still not sure if I have my footing. I do have an idea for a short story with Mormon characters and themes that I'm itching to try, and probably will here soon, since my novel is giving me fits. I've also been writing a little creative nonfiction here and there. I've enjoyed it, but I'm more convinced than ever that fiction is my genre of choice.

When you get stuck, what do you do to get unstuck? How do you rekindle the fire?

First, I mope and moan and feel sorry for myself. Next, I wonder if I will ever be able to write another sentence worth publishing ever, ever again. Then I tell myself to get over it and to stop being a bad example to my writing students. Then I take a deep breath and just keep plugging away. This happens, oh, every three days or so. (Kidding. Kind of.)

As far as inspiration goes, I find that when I'm reading something really, really good it makes me want to write. Every year I buy *Best American Short Stories,* and there's always a story or two in there that gets me itching to try to do something new. I've also learned—and I've just recently learned this—that certain ideas take time. They have to simmer a while before they're fully cooked, so I have to be patient with myself. Even though some writers may disagree with me, I don't always have to be in front of the computer to be "writing." Some of my best writing ideas occur when I'm driving to the grocery store and I allow my mind to wander.

How has the gospel influenced you as a writer? Why did you choose to write about Mormons?

The gospel has influenced me in all sorts of ways, simply because my experiences as a Mormon and my personal testimony are so bound up with who I am. These influences will probably show up in my work in one way or another, even if the work isn't explicitly Mormon.

I chose to write *Bound on Earth* for a Mormon audience because as I was writing it, I felt like I was having a conversation with other Mormons like me. The concept of the eternal family, and the implications of that concept, drove me from the beginning. Although non-Mormons can (and have) read the book and relate to it, I felt a particular compulsion to share this story with those who have an intrinsic understanding of certain LDS beliefs and have experienced certain facets of our culture. ▪

photos by **scott jarvie**

jarviedigital.com

Street artist in Rome, Italy

visual arts / **photography**

Northern Spain
Scott Jarvie

Los Llanes de Aridane, La Palma, Canary Islands, Spain

Scott Jarvie

Alcalá de Henares
Scott Jarvie


JarvieDigital.com

Brandon Dorman

Brandon Dorman is an illustrator who primarily does book covers. He lives in Washington. Interviewed October 3, 2008. Website: ***brandondorman.com***

How did you get started with art and illustration?

Doodles when I was younger, and then I kind of started drawing in junior high. I took some art classes in high school and did fairly well with them. After that I said to myself, "Hey, I'm going to college, may as well pick something I like—I don't know if I'm good at anything else." I had a paper route when I was younger, but I don't think you can support yourself on a paper route. So I decided to try art and enrolled in some classes in college. I studied under Leon Parson, who was a big inspiration to me and a really good teacher. Near the end of my college career, eight of us in the class went out to New York with two of our professors—Dan Burr and Scott Frandsen—and we showed our stuff to an artist rep named Peter Lott. I was set on coming away out of New York with at least one illustration job, but even though I showed my work to a lot of people, I came away and didn't have anything to say for it. Then a couple days later Peter called and said, "What would you think if we started working together?" I said I'd give it a shot. I was still in school—I had a little under a year left—and just started turning out artwork left and right, to get it into Peter's hands so he could get it into clients' hands. From there I got one job, then another job, and I just kind of went from there.

What do you think were the defining factors in getting you from those doodles as a youngster to the artwork you're producing now?

The key for me was that parents and teachers encouraged me at a young age. I'd go home from school and be drawing pictures while my buddies were out doing something else. People were constantly saying, "Hey, you're pretty good at this," which encouraged me to keep trying—to keep making drawings and paintings. You just keep doing it. There were lots of long hours, too, since creating artwork is pretty

time-consuming. It's the same principle as in any field, really. My teacher Leon Parson put it this way: "Talent really is just the ability to persist until you get it right." Most people say, "I wish I could draw." And I say, "You can—you just have to put in as many hours as I have." If you added up all the hours, probably half my life has been spent with pencil and paper drawing and painting.

How does a piece of artwork evolve for you?

I mainly work on book covers and picture books, so my rep will email me and say, "Scholastic Books called, and they have a story they'd like you to do the cover for. They'd also like four black and white drawings to go above each chapter." I'll ask what the budget and time-line are. If they fit, then they'll send me the rough draft of the manuscript. I'm a decent reader but if a book's two or three hundred pages long, it can take me two days or so to read it, so what I'll often do is have either my wife or my sister or my sisters-in-law or my mom read to me. I rely on them—sometimes I'll call them and ask, "What happened with this character in this book?"

If the art director gives you direction, you draw up the direction, you give it to them, and you don't have to think about it. If they don't, then I have to come up with something out my head. I'll work up anywhere from one to three sketches and send them to the art directors and the editors to look at. They usually look at it and take it into a meeting, then come back with feedback. They'll say, "Okay, we want you to change this," or "We like this, we don't like this, there's three sketches here, let's combine these two." Now that we've determined exactly what we want, I'll refine the drawing, then send it to them. They'll send it back, I paint it, and I send it to them. And then they pay me. With life as an illustrator, usually payment is out about two months, so you've got to have stuff coming in from what you did before.

Do you work with traditional media or digital?

I've done 100% digital ever since I came out of school. I painted with oil and acrylics in school and I enjoyed having an actual painting versus a bunch of ones and zeros on my computer, but the digital arena is

a lot faster. From an illustrator's perspective, you've got to earn money for your family and you've got to do jobs weekly. The editor or art director will come back and say, "We like this, but can you tweak her left earlobe?" On the computer I can do that in twenty minutes, save it, and email it to them. If I weren't using digital, they'd have the final art, they'd have to mail it back to me, I'd have to fix it with my paints, which would probably take me twice as long, and then I'd have to mail it back to them, so we're out another week—versus half an hour for digital.

Because I've been able to take on more jobs than I would have been able to traditionally, I've learned more about creating images. And I work from home, so I'm able to leave the door open and my son can run around in here and talk to me and goof around, and he's not in my paints. But there's definitely something to be said for having an actual piece of artwork and framing it and hanging it on your wall. A digital print will never be as good-looking as a traditional oil or acrylic painting, or even a pencil drawing. There's something about the texture of it that's just magical.

What's your typical timeline on a book cover?

It really depends. There's one book I worked on that took six weeks. But then the other day I drew up a sketch and sent it to them; they replied the next day; I started painting that day, then finished it the next day, and the whole job turnaround was three days max. Usually, though, it takes me three days or so to paint, and then there's waiting for their feedback, which can sometimes take up to a week, but I'll just work on other stuff while I'm waiting.

You do a lot of fantasy illustrations. Is that a choice you made, or is it just how the jobs have turned out?

I do young adult fantasy, but I've kind of been pushed into that genre of work, for two reasons: first, it's popular right now, and so publishing companies have books that are about magic and the twelve-year-old boy who's an orphan but finds out that he's special and has some power, or there's a twelve-year-old girl who's lost and she finds a friend who she goes off with on this journey and they find out she's the ruler of the universe or something. Second, when I started doing books, some of my very first jobs were along those lines. I did that first one, then someone saw it and said, "Could you do this one?" And I did that one and then somebody else saw that one. So here I am starting to work and my first five or six jobs are all young adult fantasy, and when people ask to see my work, of course I'm going to put my work that's most recent. But I don't mind—they're fun to do.

How is painting imaginary things different for you from painting from real life?

I have a really bad habit of painting and drawing out of my head. But it's one of those double-edged swords, because when I do take a reference picture, I end up copying it exactly. And it's hard for me to paint realistically—I was in a head painting class one time

and I had a lot more fun doing caricatures and distorting things. Now, I'll look up pictures of things if I need to, but I rarely take a photograph that I've taken and copy straight from it. A lot of stuff is out of my head. The weakness there is that you start to draw the same things out of your head—you start to make hands the same, because you're not looking at different types of hands. You have to try to counteract that. Also, a lot of times you don't get everything exactly right—noses and faces and things can be out of whack pretty easily when you're just drawing them out of your head.

What was it like illustrating Christ in *In the Garden?*

Kind of intimidating. One of my teachers said that before he did a painting of Christ, he cleaned out his whole office. At the time, my workstation was in the bedroom where my wife and I slept, so I got up in the morning and walked about four steps and sat down at work. I'd make an effort to make sure the place was clean. Because of the time thing, though, I was saying to myself, "I've got to get this done. This is kind of how I picture Him, and it's going to be a children's book, so I probably want to make Him look closer to the stereotypical Christ with the beard and everything." I did some research but not much. A lot of it was based on how I'd seen him in other paintings. Maybe it's good that I didn't sit there and fume and fret about how I was going to paint Him—instead, it was, "I've got zero time on this project, so I've just got to do it."

How do you see the gospel influencing both you as an artist and your artwork?

When I see artists do stuff that's not very moral or tasteful, it turns me off. I almost feel like they're abusing the talent they've developed. The gospel definitely keeps me away from making artwork that is dark—I think being a member of the Church and having a good outlook on life and an understanding of the gospel reflects in your artwork. Now, I am working on the Goosebumps series, which is a horror line. But even then, I'm still making it fairly lighthearted, and that's because the gospel's front and center. I have no desire to make distasteful or dark images.

What's the most satisfying part of your job?

Probably receiving an email from somebody that says, "I picked up your book and our daughter really loves it." Or going over to somebody else's house and seeing one of my books on their living room end table or something. It's nice to know you've created something that somebody else enjoys. ▪


LANSO

Ralphie Jacobs

Ralphie Jacobs is a photographer who lives in Texas. Interviewed September 20, 2008. Website: ***bandralphie.blogspot.com***

How did you get started with photography?

Getting my kids to acknowledge me any time I had a camera in my hand was hard work. Getting a good picture out of it was impossible. After several attempts, I'd hand it over to my husband and proclaim dramatically, "I can't take it any more!" So, I think that my interest in photography started innocently: just trying to get pictures to be sharp in low light, adding a little drama to a photo by finding an interesting angle or focusing on detail. Basically, I just wanted beautiful pictures of my busy, growing little girls. I wanted to learn how to freeze time.

In one of your blog posts, you mentioned that you're always working on how to get better at your craft. How do you do that?

Experimentation. I am always trying to work the system. I figure, "A lot of other people know how to get this done. Why can't I be part of that group? I'm a good groupie." So I ask questions, read books, and push lots of mysterious buttons! But most importantly, I fill my memory card, upload the pictures, and then fill it again.

You also mentioned that you take lots of bad pictures. Can you talk a little about that and how experimentation figures in to your photography?

Ha! You read my mind—it's everything! If you don't keep trying, you'll never figure out how you accidentally got that great shot! (Which happens to me all the time, by the way.) And I do: I take a lot of bad pictures, but that's okay. Typically, one out of every ten frames you shoot will turn out to be a good shot. That's not very good odds, so put that single-lens reflex (SLR) camera on "continuous shot" mode and go crazy. You'll find after taking two hundred pictures that there are about twenty that are really good and worth flagging for post-processing.

What cameras/lenses have you used? Has that made a difference? Any favorites?

What I do best is photograph individuals. And for that reason, I love a lens that can give me low apertures and great depth of field. I find all of this in my 50mm 1.8 lens.

I shoot with a Nikon D80. When purchasing my first SLR, I wanted something that would give me room to grow, that had all of the major features of the high-end cameras, and that would be a good friend to me right from the beginning. I am very happy to say that the D80 has been all of that. It really does know how to treat a girl right. Nikon, I love you.

What are your favorite types of shots?

All of my photographs are taken with natural lighting. Like I have said on my blog many times, I don't use my flash. Never, ever, ever. If the lighting isn't good enough, then I don't take the shot. I dislike the flash that much. Natural light is pretty snooty sometimes, and it can get a little dicey, but that's when you get to unleash your creativity. One of my favorite shots is a picture of my daughter running in a field of tall grass and the evening light is making the tips of the grass glow like candles. Light is a secret ingredient to great art. Often I'll find myself staring at a photo, struggling to put my finger on why I love it so much. And every time the answer is the same: lighting.

You mostly photograph people—why?

I love personality. And people have no end of it. The more obvious the emotion, the more a photograph moves me. These are the pictures where there is a true story being told—when people are relaxed and keeping it real. Children have so many of those looks—they have yet to learn to hide their feelings from a camera, and for this reason they are my most cherished subjects.

What sort of post-processing do you like to do on your images?

I am the kind of photographer that loves drama. Scratch that. What I meant to say was, I'm a female; therefore, I love drama. So, post-processing is one of my favorite parts of photography—I get to be dramatic!

I am a huge fan of black-and-white conversions. I love the way it makes skin look porcelain and smooth. That and I get a kick out of clicking back and forth between the before-and-after pictures, dreaming that we could do that kind of processing in reality: before-after-before-after … I could do it all day.

I also have a passion for vintage post-processing and adding texture.

How do you balance motherhood and photography? Or is it ever even an issue?

This really hasn't been an issue. In fact, it has given me a new perspective on life. Seeing a huge mess of sidewalk chalk and dust-covered children is not viewed as an infraction but a great opportunity to freeze time and make a memory. It's something that I can do to feel more rounded and fulfilled but at the same time not lose any quality of family life. I believe that my passion for photography has been an aid in getting us to spend quiet time together, make silly faces, and love one another for who we really are.

How do you see the gospel influencing your work?

The gospel has always been centered around families, on relationships between people and our Heavenly Father. This truth underlies everything. Because I believe that I have a Father in Heaven, I take pictures of things that are meaningful—that feel important to me because of what I know: pictures of happiness, individuality, and loving families. I have often looked through pictures of my grandparents and parents, soaking in every detail, every little thing that would tell me something about who they where. Pictures link generations together in a way that is personal. ▪

Nicole Sheahan

Nicole Sheahan is a singer/songwriter and is currently a BYU student. Interviewed Sept. 20, 2008. Website: ***nicolesheahan.com***

How did you get started with music?

I've always loved to sing, but I didn't get serious about it until a couple years ago. I took a songwriting class here at BYU from Ron Simpson, and I just realized how much I loved to express my life experiences through music. It was a really therapeutic thing for me, and I found that sharing it with other people was even more exciting. When I first came to BYU, I thought I was going to study French or maybe something math- or science-related, because I knew I loved music, but I didn't know that I could actually pursue a career in music. Once I took the songwriting class and realized that I could write songs, I just started writing, and I love to do it. I would write songs every day if I could.

What's your major?

I'm a media music major. I applied a year and a half ago and put my whole heart into the audition, but then I got the letter saying I didn't get in and that I'd have to wait another year to try again. When I got that letter, I felt this peace from Heavenly Father. I got on my knees and said, "Okay, if this isn't what I'm supposed to do, then there's something else I'm supposed to do, and I know you have something you want me to do." I felt like I needed to trust Him. That's actually what my song "In Your Hands" is about—I wrote

the song after that experience, and it really helped me to learn to trust Heavenly Father.

Then a few weeks later Ron Simpson, the director of the media music program, called me up and said that a spot had opened and they wanted me in the program. I said, "What? Are you kidding?" I was so surprised but grateful. I'm glad it happened that way, because I learned more about myself and why I want to pursue music, and it also made me realize everyone has a different road to get to where they want to be. Heavenly Father needs us to use our gifts in so many different ways, and every person is unique. It made me have a stronger testimony that He has a plan for me and also for every other person.

What music has influenced you as a person and as an artist?

There are a bunch of artists who have influenced my writing—Stephanie Smith, Cherie Call, Nichole Nordeman, and Natalie Grant are the top four. That was the music I listened to all the time. I would listen to their lyrics and the music going along with it, and even before I started songwriting, it just amazed me how they could tell stories that I could relate to and how their stories, through music, could impact my life—how I think and how I act. The artists who have influenced me the most are the ones with strong and powerful lyrics that say something new.

Have you had any mentors?

Ron Simpson has been an amazing mentor to me. He really cares about the people who are in the media music program at BYU. He wants us to succeed and to use music in a way that will change the world. He wants us prepared to be able to share strong messages with the world.

Another mentor is actually someone I've never met: Kenneth Cope. I sent him a message one time on MySpace, thanked him for his songs because they've had a big influence on me, and asked him to listen to a couple of my songs. After he listened, he asked if we could trade CDs. I was really excited about that. Ever

since then, we've emailed back and forth. He's helped me see that God sent me here to earth with these specific gifts and passions for a reason, and that I have to work hard to understand how He really wants me to use those gifts. It's funny because I haven't met him, but one of these days I'm sure we'll meet in person at a concert or a show.

Could you tell us more about the media music program?

I love the media music program. It focuses on songwriting, film scoring, and sound production. I actually didn't know it existed until the end of my freshman year. It encompasses a lot of the main music major classes and then has specific classes like sound recording and film scoring. A lot of schools don't have this—it's a blessing that BYU offers the media music program, because it's so important that we have people who are prepared and trained to make quality music, both on a small scale and on a large scale. With all the inappropriate music and lyrics coming out, we need people who are making music that is uplifting and that has intriguing lyrics and beautiful music to go along with it so people can listen to good music with a good message.

Can you tell us a little bit about your genesis as a songwriter? What was it like writing your first song?

I was at a Soundcheck Seminar, which was a seminar we had every week with a bunch of different musicians from around here. I went to it the first night and was a little overwhelmed. I hadn't written a song yet. I'd tried —I'd written a lot of lyrics, but I'd never put them to music. I knew I really wanted to write songs but was almost scared to start because I'd never done it before. I didn't know if I could do it or how it would turn out.

That night after I left, I was walking back to my car, feeling overwhelmed because there were some famous people at the seminar and I thought, "They're so good—I don't know if I can do this." Then a thought came to my mind, a feeling like Heavenly Father was telling me that as long as He knows me, it doesn't matter if no one else knows me—that I can do these things I wanted to do, and that I can do anything as long as I rely on Him and put my trust in Him. And "As Long As You Know Me" was the first song I wrote. The melody and the words fell into place. It took a lot of work, and I rewrote a lot, but that song was a lesson I needed to learn —to not get overwhelmed with how many people there were trying to do the same thing, but to remember

that each person has something important to offer, and I too had something I could share with other people. I have to believe in myself and I have to believe that God knows me, that I'm not just part of a crowd, but that I'm important to Him and His plan. That was the first real song that I wrote.

How did your album* Invisible Facts *get its start?

I had no idea I was going to record an album. My producer, Jacob Luttrell, was teaching artist development courses here in Provo and in Orem. I'd heard what an incredible performer he was and had heard everyone rave about his songwriting and performing skills, and then I saw his fliers, so I took a few courses with

him. We were working on songwriting a bit, and then we started recording a few demos, and I really liked his style—his production arrangements fit so well with my music, and he was really easy-going and easy to work with. I felt comfortable sharing my songs with him and letting him come up with arrangements for the songs with the other instruments, so then I talked to him about whether I could afford an album. I had no idea how expensive recording costs were. My dad and I combined our money and decided to record an album, and Jacob produced it.

We were supposed to finish recording a lot earlier than we did—dates got pushed back and with school it wasn't as easy to have the time to get into the studio to record—but when I look back on the process, I think it took longer for a reason. There were a couple songs I didn't write until we were in the middle of recording, and I feel those songs really needed to be on this CD. "Why I Believe" was one of those songs. About a year ago I got a bad cold, and I didn't want to record with my cold voice. It was disgusting. So, we took some time off and didn't record for a while, and during that time, I felt like Heavenly Father taught me a lot of things. He taught me to be more humble and to really rely on him more for everything. Even though a cold isn't a life or death situation, it made me realize how I can receive strength from the Savior no matter what I'm going through—even the small things like a cold or having a bad day. I started writing "Why I Believe" in that time, and I felt like that song really needed to be on the album. I've had a lot of people say that it's their favorite song. It's my favorite too, because it's about the things that are most important to me. It's my testimony.

How do you see the gospel influencing your music?

The gospel has influenced my music a lot. It can't help but affect the way I think about everything. There's a line in "Why I Believe" where I say, "I used to be so much different, my heart's not always right where it should be, but I've felt the Savior's power to change my soul inside, and I know there's a way back because He died." I'm not a perfect person—and none of us are—but I've seen how the gospel and the Savior's atonement have changed my heart, making me want to be the person Heavenly Father wants me to be.

I'm able to learn from my experiences—success and failure and all the different things we experience in life—in a way that helps me. The hope that through Heavenly Father and the Savior you can become

whatever person you want to become completely affects my music and my songwriting. Even when I fail, if I'll look up to Heavenly Father, He'll help me see something I can learn from that. Those are the things I love to express the most through songs because those are the things that are most important to me. The gospel has helped me think more positively about life's experiences—about turning them into learning situations and just getting back up again, remembering that even if something doesn't turn out the way I expect, that's okay. There's a plan. There's a reason for everything.

What was the transition like in becoming a singer/songwriter?

At that Soundcheck Seminar, one of the people in charge of the seminar would always say, "Don't say, 'I would like to be a singer/songwriter.' Say, 'I *am* a singer/songwriter,' or 'I am a writer,' or 'I am an artist.' Say what you are, and you believe it, and you become it." I took that advice, so when people would ask me what I do, I'd say, "I'm a singer/songwriter," even though at first I'd only had one song that I'd written. You don't have to have all this success to say that's what you are—if you believe it, then you are it. So the transition was kind of quick. I feel I've become more of a singer/songwriter and a better performer because I've believed it.

Where do you find your gigs?

A lot of shows lately have been through word of mouth. I don't have a manager right now—I don't feel like it's the right time for that, and it's expensive too—but starting out I'd just talk to friends who were performers and ask if I could open for them. Or I'd go to open mics and play, and people would ask if I wanted to play for them, and different opportunities would arise. I'll play wherever, whenever—I want to take any opportunity that comes, because I love to share my music, and the only way to improve is to just do it and take those risks. Even through doing shows where only five people are in the audience, opportunities will come out of that.

Last year I got to open for Jericho Road and in October I'm opening for Alex Boyé. It's kind of crazy to me because three years ago, when I didn't know I could write a song, I would listen to Alex's CD and loved his music. When he asked me if I'd be one of the openers at his show, I said, "Are you kidding?" It was a huge blessing to be able to share my music with more people.

Where do you see things going in the future with your singing/songwriting?

I'm not sure exactly what's going to happen in the future, but I know I'm going to continue writing songs. I want to record another album in the next couple years, but I want to wait until I feel ready for that, because I'm trying to figure out if I want to stay an independent artist or sign with a local label. I also want to continue performing. Over the summer I did this songwriting competition and got a song on the Mormon Battalion CD that's going to be released in a few months. That was a new experience for me—writing something that wasn't about my life—so I had to research and study it. It would be cool to write for other projects as well. I'll be graduating in 2010, and finishing up school is going to open new doors and give me ideas as to how I can use my music to lift others and also make a career out of it. ▪

Kelly Loosli

BYU Animation

Kelly Loosli has worked at DreamWorks and Buena Vista and helped found the animation program at BYU, which is where he teaches. Interviewed October 2, 2008. Website: ***et.byu.edu/animation***

What is your background with animation and film?

I made my first animated film when I was eleven. Then when I was fourteen, I made a little clay-animated film. I was having it transferred to video when an advertiser saw it, a man by the name of Richard Paul Evans (people know him because he wrote *The Christmas Box)*. When I was fifteen, I started working for him doing low-budget clay animation commercials. I came to BYU and my sophomore year I made a short film called *Nocturnal* that won a student Emmy.

After I graduated I moved to Los Angeles and got a job at DreamWorks. I was over the sculpting/character design department for the original *Shrek,* mostly as a coordinator but I also got to do some sculpting. I worked there for about two years, then left to go work

for the live action division of Disney, which is called Buena Vista. Then my father-in-law died. We moved back to Utah and I ended up working for Feature Films for Families in Salt Lake.

Back when I was a student at BYU, one of the industrial design faculty, Brent Adams, told me he was teaching a 3D class and that I could come take it. I took his class and when I came back to Utah, he recruited me to teach. I taught a class for the film program in 1999. Then in 2000, I got hired to help create the animation program, and I've been here ever since.

Can you tell us more about the formation of the animation department?

It was Brent Adams, an illustration faculty named Richard Hull, and an associate dean named April. They had seen that within a ten-year period there were a bunch of students—industrial design students, film students, illustration students—all making animated films, despite the fact that BYU wasn't really supporting it. And a lot of them were already getting placed out in the industry; some guys were at Digital Domain, some at Disney, some at DreamWorks.

So they got approval in 2000 to see what we could do to put together a curriculum. We put it together and sent it up the ranks to get approved. It was unheard of, but it got approved first pass. The dean here was Newell Dayley, who had experienced a similar thing—when Newell was teaching music at BYU, jazz wasn't permitted on campus. Newell and others said, "Jazz isn't inherently bad," and they finally got jazz approved and showed what a great thing it was, so he was very supportive of faculty being innovative.

Newell moved me over from the Visual Arts department into the Theatre and Media Arts Department. Then we found Ryan Woodward, who came in the second or third year when the program was officially approved. They didn't want us to add a ton of classes, so we found classes in other departments and tried to see how all those could add together to give students a broad experience. Students were taking their 3D classes from Industrial Design, they were taking all their core art classes from Visual Arts, they were taking all their film and film history classes from Theatre and Media Arts, and that's how we built the program.

We took my experience from industry first and said, "Let's imitate what industry is doing." We started making those group films and they started winning awards, and that's what brought us the initial attention and got us approved. And then there were people like Visual Arts faculty who were really supportive and would let our kids into their figure drawing classes. Darl Larsen, who is a film history teacher, started teaching the animation history course for us. Everybody just kind of pitched in—they're all equally to blame for the success of the program. Although it's just three core faculty, if you expand that out to who's actually teaching our students, it's truly interdisciplinary: two colleges and three departments.

We just hired away Cynthia Overman, the head of the character animation department at CalArts, which is the school Disney created. And we're hiring another faculty member, which takes us to five. We're also currently trying to revise the program. When we first created it, it was all about, "How many openings are in these classes and are they of value?" Now, without ruining what we've already done to be successful, we're going to try to figure out if this is the best method for helping students, or if there's a better curriculum we can create from scratch now that we have enough faculty to support it.

And then the Center, which was created last year, has given us these two new faculty spots. And the Computer Science department is now an active part of the center.

How did the Center get started?

First of all, interdisciplinary programs are really hard to administrate. Between three departments and two colleges, it's a lot of work. There needed to be some way to have some control so that if one of the deans in one of the colleges decided to change things, it wouldn't mess everything up for everybody else. They decided that a center would be a good way to bridge colleges—like the Kennedy Center.

At the same time, the University of Utah and Arizona State were trying to recruit Brent and me away, and studios and some other schools were trying to recruit Ryan. All of that came to the attention of BYU and they said, "Look, we want this program. Let's do this." And they did. They got two deans together to oversee the thing and created the Center.

While that was happening, Computer Science said, "You guys have been placing our students; we want in. What do we need to do?" For years we'd been having their students work on our films, in an unofficial capacity, and we were having a lot of success—we were placing their kids at DreamWorks and Pixar. So they just jumped in.

What do you think is the key to the success of the animation program?

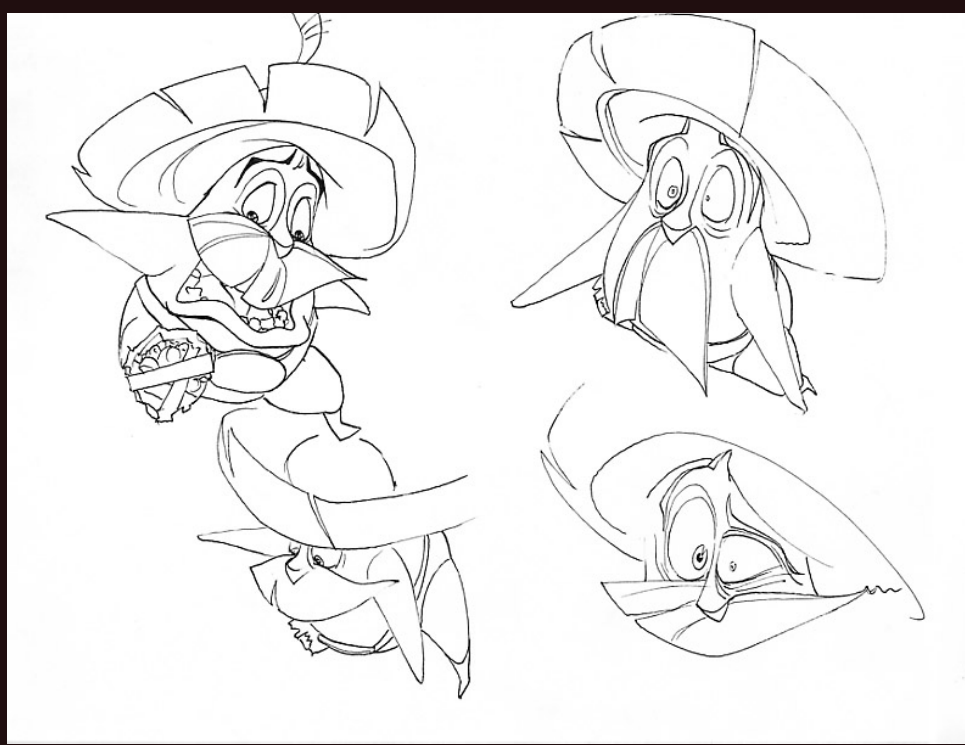
Our students really put in a ton of time. They live in the labs. Although they only get a BFA out of the program, they're basically putting in the time to get an MFA.

We also emphasize group, collaborative projects versus independent projects. We do emphasize individual artistic development, but when we make our big projects, they're all group projects, and that simulates what they're going to find out in the real world. Because of that, they're really easy to transition. When Ed Catmull (founder and president of Pixar) was here in the spring, he said that one of the things he likes about BYU students is that there's no ramp-up time—they can come out of school and go right into production because our system is set up exactly like what they do in industry.

The other thing I would say is that the faculty put in a ton of time. They're not your 9–5 faculty. You've got Brent, myself, Ryan, and Cynthia just started but I know she's this way too, where we've been giving up our summers—when we're not getting paid to be here—and we're here working with students, we're on the phone, we're shooting emails at nights. All of us have done a lot of through-the-night shifts working on films with students. We really emphasize mentoring, probably more than normal academic teaching. And as soon as students see that faculty are putting in that much time, they end up putting in a lot more time.

Why the passion?

Our mission statement is to place as many values-based people into the entertainment industry as we can.



I think that most people who are in media of any sort know that somewhere along the line they saw some films that really impacted their life. You realize how powerful media can be, and then you think about your own testimony and experiences. And in my case or in Ryan's case, you go, "Man, I work with a lot of sleazeballs or a lot of weirdos, and I've got little kids—I don't want them deciding what types of products are being made. I'd rather have values-based people." You see a lot of people where it's their testimony that hooks them into the greater vision of what can actually be done.

A lot of people are motivated occupationally just by fear—they just want to make a good living. And our students do make a good living, but I think most of it is that greater idea. Maybe it's missionary work, maybe it's being involved in something that will affect people's lives. At least that's the way it is for me, and I know it's the same for the other faculty.

How do you see the gospel and values in general influencing your animation and your films?

When we first started making movies, our movies were fairly Warners Brothers-esque. I don't want to say violent, because it's not like there was blood splattering, but they were pretty aggressive movies. As we've honed our skills and talents and tried to help students broaden their minds, however, we've moved into some different storytelling. We're making a movie right now called *Kites,* which is a story about a Chinese-American boy whose grandfather dies. While he's mourning the death of his grandpa, his grandpa

shows up out on the fire escape of his apartment building. He follows his grandpa up to the roof and finds him flying these Chinese kites. The grandpa gives the boy one of the kites, it pulls him up into the sky, and they have this whole adventure in the sky on these kites. He gets a kind of last hurrah, and then Grandpa walks off into the sunset in the clouds and the boy takes off on his kite.

That's a pretty ethereal sort of spiritual story, and the students are starting to grasp that, "Hey, we need to say something, we need to have a value." We brought in a Dutch animation director who won an Academy Award for some fairly spiritually based stuff, and his whole visit is what inspired these kids to do something more along these lines. You see more and more of that thing happening. At the same time, these students are just learning how to tell stories, and there's a lot to it.

How do you see animation and film building the kingdom?

I think I came to love animation because my dad was able to take the basic animated films I was watching and use them to help me understand gospel concepts. Pinocchio became a big film for me because my dad could teach me about listening to the Holy Ghost. Just as the Savior taught using parables, it's also a way to teach hard concepts. Stories are such a powerful part of human existence.

We're competing against people with billions of dollars making media. I have a lot of friends who are homosexuals, so I don't want this to be slanderous, but after the TV show "Will and Grace" came out, look at how people felt about homosexuality. Why aren't Church members doing more to create product that helps sway people in another direction? Shortly after *Napoleon Dynamite* and *New York Doll* came out, one of the original MTV VJs, Kurt Loder, wrote an article about how the BYU film program was turning out people who were really in touch with the power of innocence and goodness. This is from a cynical, jaded New Yorker who doesn't care, he's not a values-based person, but he's saying that this could be the new wave of film because these people have tapped into something that is neat and unique and fresh. And you see that we can touch even the most jaded people.

There are so many ugly things out there that we should be creating beautiful art, doing stuff that testifies of God's creations. There's so much we can do with it that isn't currently being done. Animation is cool because you can create all the worlds you want, or you

can just imitate the beautiful world we live in. You can take people places they can't ordinarily go. If you can get enough positive media out there, it can influence people regularly. That's the greater vision.

With placing the animation students out in industry, how did those connections develop?

We were making these films and people started seeing them at festivals. At the same time, our students were sending their demo reels out, and people would see their reels, hire or intern one of our students, and then get hooked on BYU students. Digital Domain hired one LDS guy and were totally impressed with him, so they brought on another and then another.

We placed a kid who wasn't even in our program, a computer science student who had worked on three films with us. He sent in his demo reel and one of the guys who's been at Pixar since it started, Eben Ostby, watched it and was blown away. He said, "We brought him in as an intern, then we realized that he was the easiest guy to work with. He was super nice and was really teachable, so we told him to let his friends know to apply." We'd already been in touch with Pixar because Ed Catmull is a Utah guy, raised LDS, and Ed said, "Go make a trip out there." So the Human Resources people came out here to recruit, and we did our little dog and pony show and they said, "This is the most amazing thing." And they just started coming out regularly.

As soon as they saw that we were a fourth of their entire internship program, Ed finally just said, "Okay, we're going to get officially involved with them." One of the guys who isn't LDS but was raised in Salt Lake said, "I want to be in charge of them. I love Utah and I think these guys are awesome." He was put in charge of us as a school, and so he comes out twice a semester.

The program's not that old, but over the course of two years they've recognized us and all of a sudden we're partners.

George Lucas's company, ILM, hired some students. The guy who set up the head for Davy Jones on *Pirates of the Caribbean,* Jason Smith, is a BYU grad. He was written up as one of the top ten people in the effects industry under 35 to watch. They had the same experience—one person after another started getting placed there, and they said, "These guys are awesome."

Almost all of the modeling department at DreamWorks are former BYU guys. It's the same as anywhere—people want to hire their friends or like-minded people, and you start to see these little cultures sprouting up. As soon as other studios found out how much DreamWorks and Pixar were recruiting us, they decided they had to come check us out.

Our films have been a good benefit for the students, but it's also the students' work ethic. When they get out in the industry, they're such good examples that that's what opens up the doors. They're the nicest people. You don't have BYU grads coming in hung over; they're not stepping out for smoking breaks, so they're more productive. That's not to say there aren't jerks here, because we do have our share of jerks in the program. But by and large, people recognize the quality of the people BYU turns out and they love it.

What's the process of putting together one of these student films?

At the beginning of the students' junior year, we have an open pitch, where they come and present their idea to the junior class. They all pitch ideas, and then the juniors vote. What typically happens is they go away with the one idea, then they come back with different versions based on that same idea. They repitch it, vote on it, and then start doing concept art and storyboards. In the winter semester of their junior year they vote on which student they want to be their director, which they want to be their producer, and who's going to do what. If there are voices, they record the voices. Then through the spring and summer they build the models. The next year they animate it, light it, and render it. They all know that in industry they really only do one thing, so they focus on that one thing on the senior film. They help out in other areas to make sure the film gets done, but they get to become an expert at that one area. And that's it. It's about an eighteen-month process. When the film's done, we finish it up and make copies and start pumping them out to festivals and competitions.

We run it a bit like priests quorum—I've been in the priests quorum nine years—where the whole idea is to get the boys to actually run the quorum. It's the same here. When studios come to visit us, we as faculty tour

the people around and then sit in the back of the room while the students give the presentation to the studios. They run their own show. They set their own schedules. We facilitate equipment; we give feedback; we break up fights; we weigh in if we think they're going down the wrong path; we advise; and we're there all the time, but we essentially let them run the process.

The animation program and field are both very competitive. What advice do you have for people interested in getting in?

We teach our prerequisite courses to 130–150 students a year. Out of those, ninety will apply, and we accept twenty-five. The key to getting into our program is drawing the human figure. Once you're in, take advantage of the cutting-edge technology readily available to undergraduates here. We have access to the supercomputer and other high-end rendering solutions that other schools don't have.

At that point it's about students just spending the time and trusting the faculty. Students who don't let obstacles hold them back but put in the time and develop a strong core set of skills—usually one skill that's really technical and one skill that's strongly artistic—are the people we place. We have over 90% placement, and our kids on average rival the highest paid graduates of BYU.

Because they're getting university experience, their skill set and their knowledge set is so much broader than kids coming out of an art school that it seems to give them longevity in the industry. Learning is a part of who they are, so they can learn and adapt and grow. That's what keeps you fresh and viable in the industry. I'd say that's probably the same as with the gospel—as soon as you're not teachable, you're toast.

Where do you see the animation program going in the future?

We're hoping to expand it by creating a minor so all these other programs that have helped build our program—illustration, photography, fine arts, media arts, theatre, industrial design—can come participate with us. That way we can leverage their students to flood the market, with the idea being that we want to get as many of these values-based people out there as we can. And we know that all these other programs here are teaching the same sound artistic fundamentals and then backing that up with spiritual content. We can easily see our program doubling its reach in terms of placement of students. We hope as we push and grow that we're going to start to place students in more creative positions, too, and eventually start to see people who've come out of our program in producer and director roles. Those are the people who are going to make the impact we'll see directly. Everybody makes an impact based on their work ethic and their good example, but we think there are some Brad Birds and some John Lasseters and some Walt Disneys and some real leaders in among the kids we're teaching. ▪

Ty Carter

Ty Carter is an animation student at BYU. Interviewed October 17, 2008. Website: ***tycarter.blogspot.com***

How did you get started with animation?

I started drawing as far back as I can remember. I did a lot of painting in high school but was a very active athlete playing soccer and basketball. That divided my time back then.

One night I was working on some high school homework when my dad started screaming at me to come upstairs. I thought I was in trouble until I got up to the family room and there he was in front of the TV.

"Have you seen this?" he asked.

There was a special on PBS featuring BYU's new animation program. I remember just watching it all night, although I had a history test the next day.

I was intrigued and, more importantly, inspired! It was the kind of inspiration that gives you comfort. My dad was just as excited and had arranged a day to meet with Brent Adams shortly thereafter. Brent explained the program's structure and future plans. He gave me

a card with *Lemmings* and *Lion and the Mouse* (current productions of the time) images. I put it right above my desk. It's still there today. That conversation really left a mark on me. I knew I wanted to do animation and now there was a way through BYU. I didn't need to spend huge amounts of money on a California art school.

Brent gave me a lot of great advice that day, and he suggested taking a sketchbook everywhere I went and drawing/writing ideas in it. So, I bought a few sketch pads and took them with me on my mission. I found it impossible to sketch as a missionary but easy to jot down ideas as they came. I filled two books full of ideas jumbled with Spanish vocabulary.

When I finished my mission, I began school at BYU and was accepted into the animation program.

Why animation?

It's an amazing medium! You can create things that are impossible. I feel like I can be a kid. Imagination has no bounds—that's a great feeling.

What has your experience with the BYU animation program been like?

The program is incredible! I was amazed at how much I already knew when I was in the big studio. The program is well run. I think students take for granted the opportunities here at BYU sometimes. CalArt (Valencia) and Art Center (Pasadena) students made me sick when I heard their tuition costs. We are so lucky to have such an amazing faculty. They dedicate their talent to this program. They could be in the industry but choose to help others get there. That's monumental to me. It tells you about the type of men and women they are.

Tell us about your internship at Disney.

Disney was an unforgettable experience. I worked with Bill Perkins (art director of *Aladdin),* Eric McLean, and Sean Kenny. They were amazing mentors. The studio is in Burbank, California. We had weekly workshops where artists like Andreas Deja (a well-known animator) taught us the do's and don't's of animation. I couldn't believe the people I was able to meet and the way they treated us. The experience is irreplaceable. It was humbling to walk in the gates each morning. Walt Disney is an inspiration to me. I couldn't help but think about what he did to bring this medium to where it is today. He's the reason the art form lives. This made the experience especially special to me.

Part of my internship at Disney involved coming up with future Disney concepts and ideas—stories. As interns we worked on some story ideas while we were at the studio. The plan was to come up with some ideas and pitch them to our mentors. The mentors really liked my pitch, but I never imagined they'd ask me to pitch it to John Lasseter.

In the room were big industry names—lead animators, heads of story, producers and executives. It was

crazy because there I was, the intern, with these great storytelling men and women, pitching a story to them. It was a unique opportunity and humbling to be a part of Disney's future.

One of the best parts about working on the pitch was receiving feedback from Mike Gabriel and Art Hernandez. (Mike directed *Rescuers Down Under* and *Pocahontas.* Art has a list of credits at Toon Disney as a lead story artist.) They gave me some great feedback that helped me solidify my ideas.

How do you see your work in animation and film building the kingdom?

I see animation as a great way of communicating and relating to others. What other medium communicates to so many people at one time?

Story can be a powerful teaching tool—Jesus demonstrated that. That really inspires me. There are so many ideas and stories to tell—each with its own unique potential, regardless of religious practice, to inspire someone for the better. You can take any wild idea, mesh it with truth, and if it's told right, it changes lives.

In a similar vein, how does the gospel influence you as an animator?

It affects everything I do. When I grow, my work grows too. It all traces back to God. He's the reason I can dream. He's the reason I can paint. Talent, if we can call it that, is connected to God. I feel immensely grateful to live at this time when animation exists. It's one of the greatest art forms created. It has so much potential. As Walt Disney said, "There's already enough bad in this world, so I make good." The gospel of Jesus Christ invites us to improve each day. It invites us to mourn with those that mourn, weep with those that weep. Art connects us to God. ▪

J. SCOTT BRONSON

J. Scott Bronson is a playwright, actor, and director who is also artistic director of the Little Theater at the Covey Center of the Arts in Provo. Interviewed September 24, 2008. Website: **coveycenter.org**

How did you start off with theatre and writing?

I took a drama class in ninth grade and got hooked. Then in high school, back when roadshows were done the way they're supposed to be done—letting the youth be in charge, with adults as shadow leaders—my best friend John and I were like Rodgers and Hammerstein. For two years we wrote original scripts: I wrote the book and the lyrics and he wrote the music.

In high school I was pretty much just an actor in plays. I did one semester of junior college, went on a mission, came back, and hung around at home for about a year and a half. Then I kind of slipped into BYU and started doing theatre there. My first semester there, I was in a major production in the Margetts Theater and in three graduate shows. Three of them were original full-length plays, and with two of them the playwrights were right there, so I was watching the process of mounting original plays. In one of them the playwright *wasn't* in attendance, and when we were getting close to opening and the show was about three hours long, one night after rehearsal we decided to sit around and decide which of our lines could be cut. Some actors were completely unwilling to cut any of theirs because they thought it was all just gospel. When it came to my part, I looked at it and I thought, "Well, I can cut this, and this, but this part here I can actually combine with this part over here, because it makes more sense for this to be over here." I was actually restructuring my role. Later on it occurred to me that that was kind of a playwriting deal. *Playwright* means builder of plays.

My second semester at BYU, I took a creative writing class, and for the final project I wrote a one-act play. I showed it to one of my theatre professors, Charles Whitman. He read it, handed it back to me, and said, "Great. Write another act." This wasn't part of any class, but I wrote another act and gave it to him. "Great," he said. "You got a third one?" So I wrote another act and turned that in to him. The next semester he and Max Golightly and Bob Nelson started a new program in the department. It was then called PDA (Playwright/Director/Actor workshop) but now it's WDA (Writer/Director/Actor workshop). That play was chosen for the very first workshop. Over the course of the next few years I was in the workshop as a writer three times and as a director once.

You've also done a lot ofTV work. How did that start out?

It started when Barta Heiner in the theatre department at BYU invited her agent to come see a performance of a play I was in called *Terra Nova.* After the show, Barta's agent said she wanted to see me, so I went up to her office in Salt Lake. She pulled out her headshot book of guys, laid it down in front of me, and said, "I want you to find someone in there who looks like you." And there wasn't anybody—she had all these young guys and old guys but nobody in the middle. "There aren't a lot of guys around here who look like you," she said. "I can get you work." But I didn't have a car and I didn't have a phone, so that didn't work out for quite a while.

Then in '89, the first year that ARTE (Actor's Repertory Theatre Ensemble) got started up at the Castle Theater, I was in their production of *Lion in the Winter* with Barta, playing Henry. I had long hair and a beard, because I wasn't in school anymore, and my picture appeared in the paper with Barta to promote the show. That was the year the Church was making the film *Easter Dream.* The director saw my picture in the paper and went to his casting director, Kate. "There's an actor with hair and a beard. He could be an apostle in our movie—see if he wants to come audition."

Kate had never heard of me, but she knew Barta, so she called Barta's agent and said she wanted to talk to me. I'd been out of BYU for three years, and one day—I don't remember why—I was on campus. I just thought I needed to stop by to talk to Barta. While I was talking to some guys in the scene shop across the hall, her agent called and said these guys wanted to know if I'd audition for them. "Sure," I said. He asked if I had representation. I said no. "Okay," he said, "I'll be your agent." So I had an agent and I had a project and I put a resume together and had a friend of mine do pictures and got a headshot and started getting jobs.

You're now the artistic director of the Covey Center Little Theater. How did that get started?

I have a friend, Thom Duncan, who is also an LDS playwright. He's opened up theaters two or three times, but he always wanted to have a Mormon theatre company. In 2001 he said, "I'm going to cash in my IRA because I'm 50 and I don't want to get to 60 without saying I didn't give this the best shot I could." And he asked me to be a part of it.

I remembered that when I was on the board of trustees for ARTE, Paul Duerden—who taught the theater management class at BYU—had come to ARTE and said, "My class wants you to use your company as a project. For a whole semester, we want to analyze what you do, then suggest ways for you to improve." Free help for a non-profit.

I told Thom, "What we need to do is see if Paul is still teaching this class, and see if they want to take on a whole new company as a project." He took it to the class and they did want to do it. Then halfway through the semester, Paul said, "I want to join you guys on this—not just as the class." So the three of us became partners and we started a company, found a space on Center Street in Orem, and did one season. It didn't work out so well, but that's when Paul and I got hooked up.

Last summer he got hired to be the general manager at the Covey Center. Very soon after he got settled in down there, he gave me a tour of the place. We wound up in a room on the side that was initially going to be a police dispatch and then a music studio. It was just a big empty room. "Think we could turn this into a theater?" "Paul," I said, "I can turn anything into a theater."

That was last August. In October I spent a couple weeks converting the room and we did a show, and before I knew it I was the artistic director for the Little Theater at the Covey Center for the Arts.

Was *Dial Tones* the first show?

Yes. I chose it simply because it only had three actors, and because we didn't have any theater lights in there. It's a play that I could do by turning on the lights and turning them off. It didn't need any special sets or special costumes, so we didn't need any money. And it was my play and I didn't charge, so we were able to get started right away. Then for Valentine's Day we put together a collection of six short plays that all had to do with love, *Anthology of Love.* Then we did another play of mine called *Stones,* which we had done up at our theater on Center Street.

We were going to go into another play of mine right afterwards—because I was trying to find plays that didn't have royalties attached—but certain circumstances made it impossible for us to go on with that production, so we took a hiatus and did some restructuring. We were actually supposed to do *Wedlocked,* but that wasn't going to work out because Marvin Payne and Steve Kapp Perry didn't have any sheet music, so there was no way for anybody to learn the songs. Later we found a way to learn the songs and did the show, and now I've finally got some other people to come in and help. I'm not even directing the next show or the one after it. We're trying to build not only an audience but a group of practitioners of the arts—playwrights, actors, directors—and trying to get more people involved.

You mentioned earlier starting a Mormon theatre company. Is the Little Theater specifically Mormon?

No, this is a government-run facility, so my only real criteria—which isn't a city dictum at all—is that I have to consider the audience. As the artistic director I have to figure out who my audience is and what they want—what works and what doesn't. If I can figure out what they like, then I can give them things they never would have thought they might have enjoyed.

What are some of the major challenges you're facing with the Little Theater?

I would like to do plays that have more than two or three actors in them. The show we just did had two characters; the show we're doing now, *Turn of the Screw,* has seven or eight characters but it's written for two actors; but *Joyful Noise,* which we also did up at our theater on Center Street, has about eight actors in it. And I'm really nervous about finding eight actors, because

there's a lot of competition for actors when you've got all the theaters around here. Nobody knows us really well, so the biggest challenge is trying to get more blood into the system.

Another challenge is finding plays that we can do that will enlighten and enliven. I've got a list of plays I want to put down for the next season, but most people haven't heard of any of them. I want to do *Seascape* by Edward Albee. It won the Pulitzer Prize and the first act has this couple sitting on the beach talking about their lives, and two giant lizards come up out of the ocean and start talking to them. It's delightful, and there are great insights about life and love. And Horton Foote—who wrote the screenplay adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird*—has three one-acts that go together in a nice trilogy called *The Roads to Home.* They're sad, funny, touching, and really wonderful little plays. I want to do them, but I don't know if I'll get to.

Tell us about writing *Stones*.

That first play I described—"Write another act, write another act"—became a play called *Heartlight* that was put on the main season at BYU, directed by Charles Whitman in 1984. Then I wrote a romantic fantasy that was put on the season and done in the Margetts in 1986, the year I got married. One day I asked Barta what I should write next. She said, "I've always wanted to direct a play about Abraham and Isaac."

Almost immediately four things popped into my head that I already knew about the play: first, it would just be Abraham and Isaac. Second, it would begin when they reach the top of Mount Moriah. Third, it would end when Abraham raises the knife. And fourth, it was going to be called "Altars." I don't know why I knew those things; I just did. And then I didn't do anything with that for seven years. I knew what it was to be a son, but I had no idea what it was to be a father.

Then in 1992, when I'd been a father for five years and had two children, I just started writing it. I thought it was going to be a full-length play, but I couldn't get it there—I came out to about fifty pages, maybe. I tried to team it up with a couple of other plays but there was just never anything right about that, so it sat around for a long time.

A few years ago, in 1999 or 2000, I'd been thinking that I would like to write a play with Jesus onstage, saying more than what we could attribute to him from scripture—an imagined life based on what I'd been taught my whole life, what I'd read in scriptures, commentary by other people, and what I thought. I wanted to represent him as a human being as well as a God, to try to make him approachable and understandable, instead of some faraway incomprehensible thing up in the sky.

One day I dropped my perpetually misbehaving automobile off at Doug's Auto and was walking home. It occurred to me that I should write a play about Jesus and his mom, Mary. My mind started racing and almost immediately two or three things became apparent. First, it had to be a companion piece to "Altars." Second, I had to have a single setting. What place was I going to set it in so it could be produceable? What situation would be most interesting for Jesus and his mom to be put together and forced to talk about something? How about if his stepdad, Joseph, has just died, and they're in his tomb? And I could take those blocks or whatever I'm using as the altar and turn them into part of the tomb. And then I had another one-word title, "Tombs."

Within two minutes of this idea occurring to me, a line popped into my head. Mary gets her son to tell her what his mission in life is going to be all about. She says, "How is it possible? Can you really do all these things?" And he would say, "My body will endure because God is my father, but my heart will endure because you are my mother." As soon as that line occurred to me, I started crying out on State Street in Orem. It's such a powerful idea and a tribute to the woman who bore him under terrible circumstances and who had to raise a God. And she was there when they crucified him. How many women want to watch their child murdered?

It blossomed immediately in my head and I thought, "That will be a great play to write someday, but there's no way I'm ready now." Then there was this almost physical thing; I didn't hear the words, but I definitely felt the phrase somewhere in my heart or head, "Write it now." So I started working on it right away. I had a small role acting in *Wait Until Dark* at Provo Theatre Company and had an hour and a half in between scenes, so most nights I sat there and worked on the play. It took, I don't know, two to four months to write it.

I was going to do a production of it up at the Castle, but the furthest we got was a reading here at the house. Then one of the actors got into another project that paid money, and I got cancer, so the whole thing fell apart. After I finished my chemotherapy, the girl who was stage manager for *Wait Until Dark* called me up in October '01 and said their little theater had a couple of dark weekends coming up and asked if I wanted to take them. I said to my wife, "I've got these two weekends I can put a play in. What should I do?" "Stones," she said.

I had to find two other actors, so I found Elwon J. Bakly, and I'd worked with Kathryn Laycock Little before, and I begged them and talked them into it. We've done it three times now. It's been slightly different each time.

In our second production, up at the Center Street theater, Elwon—who plays the son in both plays—went out paintballing one day and broke his collarbone. We had to cancel a weekend's worth of shows. When he was able to come back into the show, we had to reblock the whole end of "Altars" in a way that would keep him out of lifting any more blocks, because it was very painful for him.

Another major staging change was that in both other productions, I had more lights and versatility. Here in the Covey Center we just had six instruments. And in the Atonement scene in "Tombs," where he says, "Please strengthen me for this," we had a bright white light come and wash over him as if an angel came. We don't see the angel, but he does, and he gains some power from that. But we couldn't do that here. So at rehearsal I said, "Let's go back to this and I want to try something that was in the first draft of this play." Elwon did his part, and then I walked up to him, knelt down, and put my hands on him in some reassuring fatherly way. It just shocked him. I didn't warn him what I was going to do, and even though this was the third time we were running this scene that night, when he turned and looked at me and I smiled at him, boy, the tears just burst out. And I liked it more than the bright white light.

What was it like portraying Christ onstage?

I gave myself some rules. First, I didn't have to make him verbose, because he's talking to his mom and so it's a very high-context relationship, a kind of family shorthand. Second, he would be the politest man on the planet. Third, he would never lie. Everyone says, "Of course Jesus would never lie," but when you're writing something that's almost entirely made up of realistic dialogue—well, slightly elevated with a feel of the poetic in there, because they are bigger than life characters from a different era, but you want it to be sort of contemporary, too—people are obfuscating all the time. Little teeny white lies. I determined right off the bat that Jesus would never even do that. If there's something he didn't want to say, he would either say, "I'd rather not talk about that right now," or he would just go directly to something else. No lies or any forms of lies at all. And that was harder than you might think. It was a delicate balance, but a fun one to go down. It really makes me think a lot about the things that I say. Having written that play, even though it was years ago, I'm constantly examining the things that I say to see if I'm using the same kind of discourse that I wrote for him.

How has the gospel affected you as a writer, a director, and an actor?

It's part of my nature; it's my worldview. And nobody who creates anything can keep their worldview out of whatever it is they create, because it's just who they are.

Consciously, the effect that it has is in my understanding of the gospel: it's our job to help our neighbors come to an understanding of who they are and why they're here and where they're going, and to do our very best to build the kingdom. That doesn't mean that everything I write has to be, "Okay, this is how we're going to build the kingdom." I believe that if in the back of my mind my wish, my hope and my desire is to build the kingdom of God, somehow or another that's going to happen. I don't have to plot that out.

Say I'm going to write a romantic comedy. There's nothing about Jesus in it, no lectures or anything like that—it's just a play about two people coming together. Well, there's something holy about that, in a way. And maybe that helps build the kingdom a little bit, just making somebody happy the day they saw it, maybe. ▪

"And"

A play by Scott Bronson

This play is one of eight short works that collectively make up a full-length work entitled *Every Day a Little Death.*

(He is sitting by himself. He is in his pajamas. Pause. She enters, quickly, to get … something to take out of the room. Or she comes in to leave … something behind, so that, basically, she can get in his way before she exits … quickly.)

HIM: We can't keep them.

(She ignores him as she makes her escape. Beat. She enters, stops in front of him, wants to say something but can't quite.)

We can't keep them.

HER: Why not?

HIM: It's thirty-six gold fish!

HER: Thirty-one.

HIM: Okay.

HER: Five were dead this morning.

HIM: Great.

HER: How can you say that?

HIM: They're gold fish. Little twenty-five cent trash fish.

HER: That is just cruel, and … mean.

HIM: We can't keep them.

HER: We have to.

HIM: How?

HER: What do you mean, how?

HIM: In what manner will we keep them—store them? For instance, are we going to get a big fish tank and put 'em all in there together, or are we going to leave them all in their little fish globes, two by two?

HER: I don't know.

HIM: 'Cause this is a tiny apartment. There's not room in here for either one of those scenarios.

HER: Well, we've got them here now in those little globes.

HIM: Yeah, oh yeah, all over the teeny little counter in the teeny little kitchen, and the teeny little vanity in the teeny little bathroom, and the teeny little dresser in the teeny little bedroom, and—,

HER: I get it.

HIM: And who's gonna clean out eighteen little glass globes when they start getting all cloudy with gold fish poop?

HER: I said I get it.

(Pause.)

HIM: I'd like to take a shower without Fred and Ethel watching me.

HER: I get it already—

HIM: I can't believe you named them all.

HER: What's wrong with that?

HIM: Makes it impossible to get rid of them. You can't kill an animal with a name.

HER: Exactly!

HIM: I can't believe you didn't know they were going to be … discarded after the reception.

HER: I thought people were going to take them home.

HIM: Well, that woulda been just grand if they had but they didn't so now we've got to get rid of them.

HER: Just … get rid of 'em, huh?

(Beat.)

And, how are we supposed to do that?

HIM: And, I figured we'd just flush them down the toilet.

HER: Flush? Flush? Are you—? That's, that's just … sick.

HIM: Haven't you seen *Finding Nemo*? All plumbing leads to the ocean.

HER: Okay, first—gold fish are fresh water fish, so, the ocean would kill them. Second—all plumbing does not lead to the ocean. All plumbing leads to a sewage plant, which leads us to, third—do you know what's in the plumbing? Huh? Did little Nemo show you that? Huh? Do you know what's in the plumbing? Do you?

(Beat.)

Huh?

(Beat.)

HIM: Pythons, alligators and gold fish.

(Stunned silence. Then:)

HER: Hm.

(Pause.)

HIM: So … what are we going to do?

(Pause.)

HER: I don't know.

(Pause.)

What are we going to do?

HIM: I don't know.

(Pause.)

HER: Thank you … by the way.

HIM: For what?

HER: Last night.

(He looks at her.)

Getting the fish food.

HIM: Oh. Yeah. That.

(Beat.)

Good thing Super Wal-mart is open twenty-four hours.

(Pause.)

HER: Probably not how you thought you'd spend your wedding night.

(Beat.)

HIM: No. No, you're right. I never imagined that.

HER: Well, it was very sweet of you.

HIM: It was my pleasure.

(Pause.)

HER: Liar.

(He laughs. A bit.)

HIM: Yeah. Another thing I never imagined.

HER: What?

HIM: Lying to my wife so soon in the marriage.

(She laughs. A bit.)

HER: Wait. "So soon?"

HIM: Hm?

HER: So soon? What does that mean?

HIM: What?

HER: Lying so soon. This means … ?

HIM: What?

HER: That you knew that at some point you were going to lie to me.

(Beat.)

Right?

(Pause.)

HIM: Well, yeah.

(Open-mouthed stunned silence.)

HER: Why?

HIM: Oh, there has to be a little lying.

HER: Has to be?

HIM: Oh yeah.

HER: Again, I say, Why?

HIM: Christmas, birthdays and anniversaries. There will be lying.

(Pause.)

And Mother's Day.

(Pause.)

And if you ever ask me if any article of clothing makes you look fat, I will lie. Unless, of course, it doesn't make you look fat. In that case, I won't be lying when I say "no."

HER: Oh.

HIM: And I fully expect you to lie to me. I hope that you will. I don't want to know what I'm getting for Christmas. Spoils the magic.

(Pause.)

HER: Okay. But you just better not ever come to me and say, "Does this dress make me look fat." Because I will not lie about that.

HIM: Deal.

(Pause.)

What are we going to do with your fish, dear?

HER: I don't want them to die. I will not kill them. And I won't let you kill them either.

HIM: Okay.

(Pause.)

(And pause again.)

Okay. I have an idea.

(Beat.)

HER: What?

HIM: I'll find a pond … somewhere. Or, a few ponds, depending on size. And we'll put them all in ponds. How does that sound?

HER: Fine. I guess.

HIM: Will it make you happy?

HER: Yeah.

HIM: Really?

HER: I think so.

HIM: Well, be sure, 'cause … I haven't got anything else up my sleeve.

(Pause.)

HER: All of them?

HIM: Absolutely. How ever many ponds it takes, how ever many days it takes, I'll save all your little fishes.

HER: But …

HIM: Yes?

HER: Can I keep some?

HIM: How many?

HER: Just one pair.

HIM: Well, we've got plenty of food for them.

(Beat.)

I mean—, of course. Listen, I'm not—. I'm not trying to be some kind of tyrant here. It's not like I'm the king and you're my subject, or anything like that. I just want to be practical, that's all. I was just arguing for the side of practicality.

(Pause.)

HER: Do you think it will be practical for us to keep a couple of fish?

HIM: Which couple?

(As she sits on him and nibbles his ear, or something suggestive like that.)

HER: Adam and Eve.

HIM: Oh yeah. Very practical.

(Blackout.)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