Fancy Nancy blues

Xuemei Song

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FANCY NANCY BLUES

by Xuemei Song

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SCHOOL OF FILM AND ANIMATION
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Table of contents

Abstract
Acknowledgements
Introduction
Idea
Script
Pre-production
Synopsis
Treatment
Concept Design
  • Character Design
  • Background Design
  • Watercolor Design
  • Watercolor animation test
Storyboard and Animatic
Production
Animation
  • Pencil test
  • Watercolor Animation Technique
  • Software
Coloring
Post-production
Editing
Sound and music design
Credits and Title
Conclusions/Experience
Abstract

“Fancy Nancy Blues” is an animated graduate thesis film that is three minutes and thirty seconds long, based on sound cues that lead into images. It tells the story of a woman that plays the piano. She finds herself dreaming of romance, until other sounds interrupt her. This continues until her normal-looking husband returns home. He is a normal working man — not the one she dreams of — but she accepts her reality and meets him with a kiss.

This film is a hand-drawn animation that was produced in TV Paint Animation, Photoshop, and traditional watercolor. The film was created in full color and is accompanied by a piano soundtrack.

This paper analyzes and breaks down the entire process of this film’s production from five different stages. They are ideas, pre-production, production, post-production, final conclusion and experiences.
Acknowledgments

It would not have been possible to finish this film without my thesis advisor and chair, Skip Battaglia. A professor at the School of Film and Animation of RIT, he encouraged and challenged me through the entire process of making this film. He not only helped me to improve my idea and skills, but also gave a lot of encouragement through the whole process. I would also like to express my gratitude to Professor Tom Gasek and Professor Stephanie Maxwell, as my committee members for the many invaluable suggestions and constructive feedback that they provided. In addition, many thanks go to my watercolor teacher Jennifer Apetz, who helped me solve many technical problems.

Last but not least, I would like to express my heart-felt gratitude to my family and their encouragement and financial support during the years of study at RIT. I would like to specially thank my son, who inspired me to make this film. I also thank many of my friends and colleagues, who had contributed significantly to the success of my film.
Introduction

The creation of my graduate thesis film, “Fancy Nancy Blues,” began in March 2010 and lasted until November 2012 as a final project within the MFA animation program at the School of Film and Animation of Rochester Institute of Technology. My work was arranged under supervision of my thesis committee members Skip Battaglia, Stephanie Maxwell, Tom Gasek and Jennifer Apetz. The whole process consisted of:

1. Preproduction: story development, concept design, character and background design, storyboards and layouts
2. Production: animation, coloring
3. Postproduction: compositing, credits, sound and music design.

Idea

Sound creates visualizations for the imagination. That is what inspired me from Skip’s films, and I wanted to try this on my own with an animation experiment. I wrote this script especially for this idea.

Sound leads to images.

A woman plays piano. Then following the piano sound, she dreams about romance. There are three different sounds in real life that will bring her back from the dream. There is no background and every image will be formed by watercolor dropped onto paper for the dream.

That is my first idea about the story; I wanted to make this perfect. However I am bad at writing good stories. So I decided to make something without a story, but still capable of expressing a feeling about life.
Bill Plympton’s “Your Face”\(^1\) is a perfect example of how a great animation is not just a good story, but also portrays insights on life. It shows a funny way of lovers kissing, and uses transformations to express thoughts in the human mind.

I quickly assembled the main structure of my film by using this method. After this, I got a simple idea for an animation story. You can start with simple concept and slowly add more detail. A Story does not have to be about who, what, when, where, and/or why; it can be just an idea, telling people about your thoughts on life.

The next obstacle is deciding on what media to use to support this idea. I know I am going to make 2D hand-animation and it will be colored by watercolor. However, to achieve a frame by frame animation entirely in watercolor is never easy. As suggested by my watercolor teacher Jennifer Apetz, I would need thousands of sheets of watercolor paper, which would be very expensive even with the cheapest watercolor paper. I needed to find another way to present my film. This led to a decision of making half of the animation with real watercolor paper, and the other half with computer software. Translating this to my story, the dream segment is entirely created on watercolor paper, while Photoshop colors the segment set in reality.

**Script**

Following this idea’s inspiration, I tried to write a better script. The style was not a traditional story, but rather a portrayal of the character’s thought process. I also added sound scripts as a cue for the story’s progression.

A woman is playing the piano. She starts to daydream following the sound of piano.

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\(^1\) **Your Face** is a 1987 animated short film by Bill Plympton. It involves a man seated in a chair crooning about the face of his lover, and as he sings, his own face starts to distort in various ways. Along with several other shorts by Bill Plympton, it was also aired on MTV's *Liquid Television*. 
The notes coming out of the piano slowly forms into a man.  
(All the images come from the sound of piano.)

DREAM1.  No background when she daydream and as a contrast in life the background is in great details.

The handsome man comes to her. He bow, hold out his hand and invites her.  
She twists her hips, and holds his hands. The wind is blowing. The camera turns around. The man hugs the woman at the waist from the back. They are standing in front of a ship. The woman's hair is flying with the wind. Her dancing hair slowing transforms into ocean water, and waves grows stronger.

(Suddenly an alarm from the street breaks her dreaming)

The images return to being notes. The notes becomes dirty cloths and dishes. These pieces comes together to form the messy room in the real life.  
She stops playing, and looks around the messy room. There are her husband's dirty clothes, lying around the floor. The sink is full of dirty dishes. A fly flies towards the window.

She looks back the piano and starts to play again.

DREAM2.  The background in life will be in less detail than the first scene.

The notes come out from the piano again, and she's back to her dreaming.  
The notes are going together to form waves of the woman's hair. Her hair is still blowing with the wind. Her face turns red.

They are staring at each other. She bends her back. He holds her and kisses her. This scene turns into a silhouette, and they turns into flames.

(The crying sound of the baby breaks her dream)

The piano stops and you start to hear the woman walking  
The flame transforms into a baby's face.  
She picks up the baby and starts to rock the baby in her arms.  
She starts to sing a lullaby.  
The song comes out as colorfully notes.

(Sound: the woman put the baby down, then back to the piano)

DREAM3.  The background in life is less detail than the second one.
The colorful notes come back to her dreaming (piano sound start)
The man and woman kiss deeply. (The water surges.)
The wind is going strong. Their clothes are flying following the wind.
They start to hold hand flying in the sky and go round and round.

They become two yellow leaves and slowly fall to the ground.

(The sound of car approaching her apartment)
The images break into pieces. These pieces comes together to form her face.
She looks up.

The sound brings her back to life.

(Sound: a man is walking step by step. Then he opens the door. Piano sound is stop. Her husband lays down his bag)

He comes toward the woman and kisses her. They hug. She is smiling.

**Preproduction**

After my script had been nailed down, I moved on to the pre-production stage. First I needed to get ready to propose my thesis to the committee. The script was slightly vague and confusing for them to read. I wrote the synopsis, treatment, rationale and timeline to support my position and to provide a better picture of the project. That was just the beginning. The preproduction consisted of character designs and environment designs, color settings, basic storyboards, and the animatic. By the end of the process, I had to combine all of these elements together into a final animatic vision. Then it was round one of the feedback and suggestions. This helped to improve...
the film, and strengthen the design. A successful pre-production stage and a good, detailed design decreased the amount of work in later stages.

**Concept Design**

Concept Design for an animation involves the designing of characters and backgrounds. This includes but is not limited to new techniques, different materials, and new realms of exploration. For my experimental animation, I needed to play with different watercolor techniques to find the best design. However, all the design needs to do is contribute to the main story and themes. Concept Design is just like headlights for a car — It leads the direction for all the elements of the film. This includes determining a color style, choosing the right materials, and getting good references for all designs. It always starts with lots of simple sketches, among which only the best are chosen to develop.

For this process, I started with sketching character designs since my main story starts with a woman day-dreaming. During the summer quarter, I went to many museums and galleries to gather research that would aid me in my character designs, sound, and music. However, seeing many different works was not enough to understand the direction my film needed to go. I asked many women questions about their feelings about love. The answers were very useful for my film. During the conversations about romance, ideas like beaches, kissing and so on naturally came up. This inspired me to go to a beach to see how women and men act when they fall in love. Finally, I decided to make my dream segment look more romantic, and to make my reality segment look more realistic.
These watercolor sketches at Coney Island

- Character Design

After observing people and getting into their minds, I started to design my characters. The story has three characters — a man, a woman and a baby. However, each of these characters has two versions. One is in real life, the other one is in the woman’s dream.

Choosing a reference is a basic step for every designer. For my characters, I believed that they should be imaginary and beautiful in the dream, but for the real life part, it should be more physical and plain. When I saw an animation by Norm Bendell, I felt that the characters looked perfect for my film, so I drew many sketches similar to his style. After showing my sketches to my classmates, the feedback that I received was that it was too cartoonish.

These pictures are from Norm Bendell’s personal website.
I realized that a good character design always starts with a simple shape, but the process is never easy. First of all, there is not just one way to design characters. Every character is different — some are easy to capture, and others are a hard nut to crack. There are no shortcuts. I practiced a lot by keeping a sketchbook. The most important thing is not to simply copy what you have seen before in someone else’s animation; even if that is exactly how you want your character to be. The bottom line is, you still need originality in your character. Using my sketches as a source of research, I saved a lot of time. When observing real things, I try not to be cynical about subjects; I try to feel the thrill of it. Thinking in this way, I tried to recall what people think of my character and picked my references accordingly.

The main character in my film is a woman named Nancy. She directs the whole film to a happy ending, so her personality is very important. How she feels, what she’s thinking, what she likes and what she wants; these aspects build up a real character.

While I am creating new and never-before-seen animated characters, I also needed to make sure that my designs were functional for animation. According to the story, Nancy is a beautiful and romantic woman in her dreams. In real life, however, she is an ordinary middle-aged woman who hates her dirty kitchen and crying baby. However, she still struggles between loving and hating her life as a whole. Eventually, she chooses to accept and love both the bad and good parts of life.

I designed her to have short hair in reality, but long hair in her dream. Since she loves reading and playing the piano, she wears glasses. Her body shape and age also vary across realities. She is a housewife who cares for a baby day and night, and her face is stiff and grim from her nervous and boring life. There is not much facial expression except for an occasional smile. Thus, Nancy cannot be too cartoony.
The man was designed the same way. The man was designed to be handsome in the dream, but in reality he is more of an ordinary office worker. I wanted him to look skinny and tired. However if he looks too exhausted, he will not match well with Nancy. A rounder shape will appear cuter and soft. So in the end, the husband’s final design was slightly plump with a tired face.

The man in Nancy’s dream on the other hand, is very handsome.
First Design for man in Dream

The baby’s role in this file is to break the balance between dream and reality. So he has an angry face with struggling gestures.

First Design for baby
My background was designed in two different ways in accordance to the script. There is no background in the dream. In the reality part, a more realistic background is present, so perspective is crucial. There are four main scenes in the film: the kitchen, living room, baby’s room, and outside of the window. The kitchen is connected to the living room, so when I draw both of them, I need pay attention to the perspective as well as the position of furniture.

These details also help the film’s presentation. For example, in the kitchen shot, I added lots of laundry on the floor and bottles in the kitchen sink. These small details help to bring the audience into the story environment. Lighting is another major aspect of the background design — I designed sunlight to come from outside of the window and make the messy kitchen look a little more stereoscopic and real.
The background style changed a little to be more in accordance with the story’s progression. For example, in background 5 below, I wanted to tell the audience that the beautiful dream can come to life. However I still kept the watercolor texture and the same lighting, while the leaves and the house lost detail.

- Watercolor Design
“Hand Drawn Watercolor” animation: I need to test whether or not this approach would work. After taking a watercolor painting class with Jennifer Apetz, I realized that watercolor painting is a two sided blade. It can make the animation beautiful but at the same time very difficult to control. The original idea was that the whole animation would be painted on watercolor paper. In the interest of time and maintaining a reasonable budget, I came up with the idea of using computer to imitate watercolor qualities in certain scenes. Then I colored some of my sketches in Photoshop. However, even when I used the perfect brush, results were still far from ideal. Considering both story and my budget, a compromise had to be made, and the dream portion was done on watercolor paper, while the rest was colored on the computer.

I did some watercolor tests to determine how to color quickly and well, what kind the brush to use, and the difference between different watercolor papers. The following pictures are the results of my initial tests.
Watercolor Test: 2 Dream one;

Watercolor painting consists of five principal ingredients: paint, brushes, watercolor pencil, paper and techniques. Watercolor paint has its unique transparency, which can present the dream quality well. I cannot afford the best paint for my student project. Luckily Jennifer suggested a different paint that also worked. There are many different shapes of brushes for watercolor painting, and each produce a different quality panting. In general, natural hair brushes have superior snap and pointing, a higher capacity (hold a larger bead, produce a longer continuous stroke, and wick up more paint when moist) and a more delicate release. I find that Chinese traditional painting brush is perfect for this feature; also it’s very easy to use. Watercolor pencil is another important tool in watercolors techniques. It allows to draw fine details and to blend them.
with water. Lower end watercolor papers can resemble heavy paper more while higher end
varieties are usually entirely cotton and more porous like blotter. For my animation,
I just needed to draw the dream segment without a background, so a medium level of quality was
enough.

Watercolor techniques are unique to watercolor. Unlike oil or acrylic painting, where the
paint essentially stays where it is put and dries more or less in the form it is applied, water is an
active and complex partner in the watercolor painting process, changing both the absorbency and
shape of the paper when it is wet and the outlines and appearance of the paint as it dries. I try
many different techniques: wet in wet; dry brushes; Scumbling; scratch; taping; mixing and so on.
Wet on wet is the most useful technique for me. The essential idea for this technique is to wet an
entire sheet of paper, lay it flat until the surface no longer wicks up water but lets it sit on the
surface. Then you plunge in with a large brush saturated with paint. When the paint is almost
dry, I quickly redraw the edge to merge the watercolor edge and pencil lines of the image. The
results are rather particular.

Watercolor Test: 1 day brush dream world; 2 Wet on wet kitchen close-up

After the basic watercolor painting tests, I did more tests using Chinese brushes, medium-
quality paper, and paint. I showed the test sample to Jennifer, who gave me lots of meaningful
feedback and pointed me in the right direction to buy the cheapest (but good quality) watercolor
paper and paint. These watercolor test samples were good references for the coloring process that would come later in the production.

When my paper arrived, they were too big. In order to cut the paper to the same size, I got help from a man in the printing department. He was very nice and cut all my paper in the same size using a big cutting machine, which saved a lot of my scanning time.

- Watercolor animation test

Watercolor animation is a watercolor painting style experimental animation. There are two experimental methods. One is filming the whole process when you paint the image sequence, and the other is scanning all the images sequences frame by frame. I chose the second method to process my film because it fits my story better.

The entire watercolor painting image sequence was scanned into a computer, where I composed it by using Adobe After Effects. The result of my first watercolor animation test was not bad. Tom suggested the visual effects needed to be smoother. Skip asked me to think about how to manipulate the watercolor effect to fit the dream quality. I changed some watercolor techniques to give it a more fantasy feeling.
Storyboard and Animatic

A storyboard is a script written through images as well as words, similar to a giant comic strip. I started my storyboard in the beginning of the fall of 2010. It was a significant stage of my film that guided the entire process. My story is a combination of a daydream, sound, music, graphics and interactivity presented in a nonlinear format. The information in each medium is complementary, and not redundant. The storyboard was put together with all these elements in mind, dividing the story into its logical, nonlinear parts. These included profiles of the main characters in the story, the event/situation, the sound production process, and the history of the event/situation. When I was finished breaking the story down into its elements — both in terms of its content and the different media I could use — I needed to reassemble it into a rough storyboard. After my storyboard was done, the holes in my story became obvious. The storyboard also helped to identify the timing of the sound and music, which were needed to complete my story.

I combined all of my storyboards and my watercolor animation piece to a final animatic by using After Effects. Timing is a key to create a good animatic, and it gives your story a good rhythm that doesn’t waste time. I showed my animatic at the animatic night in SOFA. The feedback encouraged me to keep on working in watercolor, although some details needed to be improved.
Animation

Animation is the soul for the project, and also my weak point. During this process, first, I researched, such as attending animation film festivals, watching animation frame by frame, and studying how people act. My favorite animation film festival was Ottawa International Animation Film Festival, which always brings many different new ideas about how to make animation. When my script was done, I kept thinking about how to create the right animation for my story. Secondly, watching old award winning animations frame by frame, I found that the 12 basic principles of animation\(^2\) are very important too. Thirdly, to study how people act, I wanted to capture the right dynamic for animation. Also good acting can portray the story better.

I began working on the animation part in December 2010 and it lasted until October 2012. However, I took one year off for my pregnancy and looking after my first child. I made some pencil tests in the summer 2011 before I was pregnant. The morning sickness made me decide to go back China for three months. When I returned to the USA and tried to resume schooling in the fall of 2011, my pregnancy test came back with some risk factors. My doctor required me to do fetal heart checks twice weekly. I felt depressed since this scrapped my original plan of going back to school during fall quarter 2011. I finally came to a realization that I needed some adjustments for the new life. When my baby came to the world, I felt some things had changed. The way I looked the world is different now. One year later, my mom took over my four-month-old son and I got back to school during the fall quarter 2012. Finally, I was able to continue my animation process. However, I realized that I was no longer skilled at animating films. I kept on

\(^2\) The **Twelve Basic Principles of Animation** is a set of principles of animation introduced by the Disneyanimators Ollie Johnston and Frank Thomas in their 1981 book *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*. 
drawing to improve my skill and also tried to find the right way to animate the watercolor animation.

**Pencil test**

The pencil test is a main process of an animation. For my thesis, there are two parts that I needed to consider. One is in dream and the other, reality. For the dream part, my animation needed to be more fantasy like, but the reality part should be more real.

My first pencil test was the shot two where notes came out of the piano. I used six-frame rate per second. It looked too jumpy, so I adjusted to 12-frame rate per second, which looked better. Timing is very significant for the story, and also critical for establishing a character’s mood, emotion, and reaction. In addition, it can be a device to communicate aspects of a character’s personality. I decided to use 24-frame rate in the reality part to make characters look more real. Also, I got three pieces of piano music from my composer and animated my film according to the music’s rhythm.

Meanwhile, I separate my story into seven parts: Dream one, dream two, dream three, and the rest for reality parts. Dream one is a note comes to a man, then he hugs a woman in a ship. For this part of the pencil test, I needed the note to stretch well with exaggeration. Dream two is they kiss together. Following through and overlapping action\(^3\) is the key for this part. I want to leave an impression that in this part, the actions follows the laws of physics. Dream three is where they keeping kiss while they fly around, and turn to leaves which fall to the ground. The two are distorted into two leaves. This transition is not that easy for me. I drew the key pose first, and then try to stretch well. Also I needed to think about the secondary action. While the direction of the leaves’ falling isn’t a key point, pace and trajectories are. Drawing a trajectories curve for the leave’s falling is a huge effect for this part.

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\(^3\) “**Follow through**” means that separate parts of a body will continue moving after the character has stopped. "**Overlapping action**" is the tendency for parts of the body to move at different rates (an arm will move on different timing of the head and so on).
When the frame rate and timing was set down, I started to make key frame first for all the scenes. For the key frame, I needed to think about the 12 basic principles of animation and the character’s motion trajectory. Then I had to draw all the character’s movement curves. It made the character movement looked better and saved a lot of my time and improved my drawing skill for animation.

**Watercolor animation technique**

In my watercolor animation, the original idea is to color all the animation in watercolor paper by using paint. While considering my budget, story and time, I kept the dream part color on watercolor paper by paint, and the reality part color by using computer with similar watercolor effects.

For the dream part, I used both dry brush and wet brush for the watercolor paint. Watercolor animation not just one draw, it is a couple of images sequence. Also each image needs to keep color at the same place. It was the first time that I used the process by finishing one image then a second one. However when it rendered out as an animation clip, it did not look good. The color of the characters always jumped. I found another way to color my animation by watercolor paint. I put around 15 images on a big desk. Then I first colored the same color on all every image that was the same and then finish off the rese where the images were different while they were still wet. Last step, when the colors are almost dry, I used dry brush for the detail. Using this method, the images sequence looked more uniformed in terms of the technique of watercolor painting. When it was rendered out for a quick movie clip, the effect of it looked well. The final process is the scanning of all the watercolor images to computer. The paper was too thick to scan all the images sequence automatically. So I needed to scan the entire images frame by frames. Meanwhile, I needed to keep all the images in the same position when I was scanning.
For reality part, I color my animation using a computer. There are three steps to achieve the desired watercolor effect. First color flat color by using transparent brush. Secondly, color the highlight part by irregular shape brush. Thirdly, put the watercolor texture paper in under layer with 20% transparency. For choosing the best watercolor texture images, I did several watercolor tests. Different technique showed diverse effects. Finally I found the best match watercolor texture.

This images is final version for Watercolor texture

Software

Before the fall quarter 2012, I used adobe Photoshop to color the reality part of the animation. I used water-based pen for the line from the dream part, and pencil line for life part. Photoshop is easy to use and I am skilled at it. However, when I went back to school, everyone suggested me to use TVPaint Animation Software or Toon Boom Animation software.
TVPaint Animation Software has very flexible light table feature that allows optimizing the onionskin property according to need. Moreover, compared to the animation made by TVPaint animation software, the animation made by Toon Boom looked too flat. Also I was able to optimize TVPaint Animation's interface to suit my workflow. It made the animation style look very similar to the one on watercolor paper, and made the animation process even faster and convenient. For these reasons, I chose TVPaint for the rest of the life part animation. On the other hand I needed help from other people because I was running out of time. Using the TVPaint software made the cooperation easier. Before I used this software, I needed to scan the pencil test into the computer and clean it, then color it in Photoshop. Now I can finish both the pencil part and color part on TVPaint. Also there was lots of part, that needed adjustment. The scanning process wasted too much time.

**Coloring**

For my experiment watercolor animation film, there were a dream part and a reality part to color. Each one had different technique for coloring. For the beginning process, creating a color script was very valuable for the film. I created a couple of small watercolor painting for the dream shot while I made a color sample for the reality shots. I show them to friend and classmates. They gave me several good suggestions. It was still useful as a reference during the coloring stage where I found that simple is not satisfying.

In the three dream shots, there are three steps to complete the whole coloring process. First coloring the pencil images sequence by watercolor paint. Secondly, scanning all the images to the computer and lastly, cleaning them. This is very easy but a ton of work. I used the stamp
tool to clean the spots in Photoshop.

Different color have different atmosphere. I used a warm color for the dream shot because it should resemble sweet memory. Moreover, I used lots of purple color for the romantic feeling. I wanted an awakened atmosphere for the ending of the second dream. So the color changed dramatically as the crying baby image break into pieces of glass. The baby is rich light orange first and changed to mixed colorful blue and yellow and lastly turned to blue glass. It created a feeling of being angry and then a drastic change of returning to reality.

The reality shots were painted mostly in Photoshop and TVPaint, which also had three steps to consider. First, I created a color palette for the characters, which is very useful for whole coloring process. This is especially true when I need help from other people. Xin Yin helped me with the baby crying shot. The color palettes for the baby helped her in the process and made our collaboration a success. Secondly, all the coloring setting for the background needed to have similar characteristics. Finally, adding the light and shadow for the reality shots was very necessary for the coloring process. According to the light, the shadow needed to change when the character moved. Take the shot where Nancy entered the baby room for example. When Nancy opened the door, there was a light that came through to her body. So I needed to change the shadow shape when she walked into the room.

This image is the color palette for Nancy
Postproduction

Editing

Editing is both the last stage for animation, and also the middle stage. Most shots are already pre-edited from the first stage. When I showed my pencil test to my committee, I always received lots of feedback about how to editing. So I kept updating the editing throughout the whole process. For example, in my kitchen shot, it was just a first draft consisting of line drawn images in the beginning. When it was colored, all the furniture was in different layers. I want this life shot to look more three-dimensional, so I used 3D mode for the kitchen shot in After Effects. Also, I added camera movement, while I did some adjusting of the camera angle. This editing process went for a long time with constant updates due to new suggestions. Moreover, timing is another reason to keep re-editing the old shots. In addition, I always prepared a rough cut for the advisor to view my new work each week. This saved me from extra work from the beginning.

Editing requires hours of careful review through miles of animated footage to turn an idea into a compelling story. When the process went further, there were always some small details that needed to be changed to complete the story. Take the life part for example, the shot when Nancy stopped playing the piano, and turned her head to look at the window. Skip suggested to add more actions such as putting her hands off the piano or make more facial expressions when she looked over her neck. So I cut some extra parts off, and added more image sequence when she turned her face to look out the window. Cutting and arranging footage is an important part of editing which helps to tell the story better and meet specific length requirements.

Organizing the files is another important process for editing. I made a big mistake for the file naming convention during the ending stages of editing. As a result, my Aftereffect files could not find the original paths when I moved my files to another computer. Meanwhile, the lab where
my original files where saved was closed. I had to hand in my render file the next morning because that was the due day for the screening. So, I had redone many parts of editing. This made my final editing very messy. I had no choice but to try my best to get the high-guilty results at that point. This was a very good lesson, which taught me to organize the files save it in the same place, and name it in the right way.

The composition setting also affects the final rending. My composition format was HDTV, 1920x1080, square pixels with 24 frames per second. However, in the beginning my setting was different, which made my final editing very troublesome. I had to go back to change all the setting to be the same, and this cause some of my images to be disproportionate compare to the original drawing. When I put the entire After Effects file together, and exported it out as uncompressed animation, the final QuickTime file was about 11GB. Then it was imported into Final Cut Pro for synching with the sound effect and music scores. The last things, I sent the project from Final Cut Pro directly to Compressor and used the HDTV setting to render a QuickTime file, which turned out to be 987MB.

Music and sound

My composer was Stephen Bullen, who studied Music Composition at the University of Rochester. I heard of him from our school email. I started to contact him in spring quarter 2010 year, and he agreed on collaboration.

We set up a meeting and I showed my animatic film to him, and some simple music. Two weeks later, he gave me three piece of piano music for my three dream part. Meanwhile, I send these three pieces to Skip and Tom. It came back with feedbacks like:
Piano #1 is strident and athletic and forceful, but it is also a lullaby. Its directness may present a visual style, but it is non-traditional (and that is OK, absolutely).

Piano #2 is more fluid, rolling. It works well with a watercolor style and a palette and animation suggesting flow and continuance. More traditional and beautiful, but not so exciting.

Piano #3 may be the easiest to animate: most exuberant, danceable, allowing some very simile frames of animation within the general flow of the piece.

Then I got an idea to draw a timeline and frequency curve for my music. It helped my composer to get a better understand of my story and timing.

He reworked the three pieces. At that point, I felt that the first piece of music was the most effective. The second piece was too much the same and the third was a bit too fast. I liked the purposely bad piano playing and then the way the flute sound enters for a potential fantasy feeling in the first piece. It was hard to imagine how the music will work without the pictures. So I decided to leave the three pieces like this and start to animate the three dream part by this music. When my animation was almost done, I found that the music actually worked for my dream parts. So I kept these three piano pieces in my final animation.
When my project is almost done, I found that I did not have enough time for the sound effect. So I went to SOFA Cage to borrow some sound effect DVD from the music library. I found some useful sound effect for my animation, but somehow it did not fit. I was not that satisfied with the result. This made me learn that I needed a professional person to help with sound postproduction.

**Credits and Title**

When I finally came to do the credits and special effects, the film was almost due. I got help of my friend Gloria for Credits illustration, and she came up with very good work. I also gave her some of my original watercolor painting that she used as a background. I wanted to add one more animation clip which is the shot where Nancy plays the piano. However Skip gave a suggestion that the style of this does not match this movie.

On the other hand, a simple credit is never bad. It took her an hour to do the credits at the lab, and it turned out very nice. The black font in the credit with the watercolor paint background matches the style of my film.
Conclusions/Experience

This is my first time creating an experiment animation film using multiple softwares and utilizing two techniques. The experience I gained during this project is invaluable. I started with high ambitious and set big goals to create a professional short film. However, I realized how much I still have to learn and catch up in skills during the process of this film. It actually took me about a year to finish. I practiced and learned how to avoid making the same mistake. I also improved my animation techniques, while I found my weaknesses and strengths. I enjoyed the coloring process, while I struggled at animating. Anyways, I tried my best to finish it. Overall, I had learned so many things not limited to only animation but things like how to cooperate with other people, how to manage schedule for a long project, and how to get the best work done before the due date. These are the most priceless experiences that I will carry on and benefit from in any future job.

Lastly, I want to thank all my friends and teachers who encouraged me and helped me through the whole process. Also while I took off one year off school for my first child, my family gave me the biggest support. It has been a great journey and I am glad that everything went well at the end.
Appendix A

ORIGINAL PROPOSAL (SUBMITTED MAY, 2010)

The Synopsis:

Sound creates visualizations for the imagination. When a woman plays piano, she finds herself dreaming of romance, until other sounds interrupt her from her dreaming. She returns to her plain-looking working man husband when he returns home from work. He is a working man, different from her dream man, and she meets him with a kiss.

The Rationale:

I propose to do an experimental, hand-drawn animation. I intend to make sound and music work with the animation I create and to show how a sound track can create an animation. When I saw one of professor Battaglia's animations, I found that sound and images can work together perfectly. I think this is a great opportunity to experiment with how sound and motion can mutually promote each other, and improve transformations. I plan to employ techniques I've observed in Bill Plympton's short animation “Your Face”, which I believe was a great example of effective transformations. This production will be a narrative, in that it is not an abstract piece, but more of an experience than a plot. Mainly, its goal is to focus on the woman's struggle between her romantic fantasies and her return to reality. The style of the animation is intended to be flexible and changeable to match the theme of fantasy. The figures within the fantasy will be unrealistic to differentiate fantasy from reality, while the images of the husband and wife, within reality, will be presented in more realistic detail. I think that watercolor techniques would work really well with this idea; when I took the watercolor class from Jennifer Apetz, it inspired me greatly. Every image of the film will be formed by watercolor dropped onto paper.
The Treatment:

An exhausted woman sighs. She looks at a piano and sits down to play. At this time, the project's title displays.

The woman plays the piano and begins to daydream, along with the sounds of the piano. The notes coming from the piano slowly form a man. Every image is formed by the sounds of the piano.

The daydream has no background, in contrast to the detailed surroundings of reality. A handsome man comes to the woman, bows, and holds out a hand to invite her. She turns on the piano bench to take his hands. The wind blows. The camera turns to show the man hugging the woman around her waist, standing behind her while they stand on the prow of a ship. The woman's hair flies with the wind and slowly transforms into ocean waves.

A sudden alarm from the street wakes her from her daydream. The images return to being notes, and become dirty clothes and dishes. The pieces come together to form the reality of the messy room around her. She stops playing. She looks around at the dirty clothes lying on the floor and the sink full of dirty dishes, and atop the mess, a fly. The fly flies out the window.

She looks back at the piano and begins to play once more. The background of the reality around her loses its detail.

Notes come from the piano once more, and she is back to her dreaming. They form the waves of the woman's hair once more.

She blushes, and she and the man stare at each other. She arches towards him. He holds her and kisses her. The scene becomes a silhouette, and they both turn into flames.

The sound of a crying baby wakes her from her dream this time. The piano stops short and we hear the woman walking. The flames become a baby's face, and she picks up the baby and rocks him in her arms. She starts to sing a lullaby.
The song forms colorful notes. We hear the woman put the baby down and return to the piano. The realistic background has even less detail than before.

Colorful notes bring her back to the dream, and we hear the piano play once more. The man and woman kiss deeply; the ocean surges and the wind grows even stronger. Their clothes billow in the wind. They hold hands and fly up into the sky, around and around. They become two yellow leaves that slowly drift towards the ground.

The sound of an approaching car makes the images shatter, and the shattered pieces rejoin to form her face. She looks up. She hears a man walking up the steps to the front door of the house. The piano stops playing. He opens the door and sets down his bag. Her husband is a working man, and is very different from the handsome day-dream man. He comes towards her and kisses her, and they hug. She smiles.

Outside the windows, a few leaves start to fall.
TIMELINE

Fall Quarter will be spent in preproduction. I will finish the storyboard and rough draft of the animation in fall. During the Winter Quarter, I will finish animating everything and color it. The Spring quarter will be spent compositing and editing.

*There are some overlaps in the schedule reserved for the possibility of polishing up any previously completed work.*
## Thesis Production Budget

### Budget

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### Film Festival Entry's Fee

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**TOTAL** $1510.00
Appendix B

CHARACTER DESIGN SKETCHES

MAN