



THE ADVENTURES OF BAXTER & CLYDE
7 ½ MIN / U.S.A. / ANIMATED / 2022 / ENGLISH



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SYNOPSIS

In a Maine railroad junction town, a baby boy saved a duckling's life. Eight years later, the good-hearted and courageous BAXTER, partners with CLYDE, an equally good-hearted and courageous duck who has the ability to transform into any object from Baxter's world, to right wrongs, maintain peace, and, in this story, protect the moon from a monster.

The Adventures of Baxter & Clyde evokes the American television buddy cartoons of the late 1950s while paying homage to the filmmaker's family roots in Brownville Junction, Maine.

MAKING THE FILM

The film's writer, director, and animator, John Michaud has been a professional animator since the 1980s, including a stint at Microsoft animating Clippy the paperclip for Office 97 and eight years at Humongous Entertainment on their Junior Sports and Junior Adventure interactive games.

His niece Kate had performed in New York City theater and was interested in doing voice-overs. John proposed making a short cartoon with characters for her to voice. "I had been doodling a boy with a duck on his head for ages," he says, "and thought I'd use those as main characters. Then, one night before dinner, my wife Didi joked that she was so hungry she could eat the moon." This inspired the story's premise: a boy and a duck, amateur superhero buddies, save the moon from being eaten.

John scribbled a quick storyboard: First, a giant creature clutching a spoon reaches up from a mountain peak toward the moon, saying "Hungry!" Then a boy with a duck on his head pulls the moon from the monster's reach using a fishing pole. The creature sobs, and the boy explains why they can't let him eat the moon. After developing the story further, John added an introductory story about how the boy and duck, from Brownville Junction, Maine became inseparable pals. For the mountain he used Maine's highest, Katahdin, which is north of Brownville Junction.

John, who is from southern Maine, explains the significance of Brownville Junction to him: "When I was Baxter's age, I spent part of that summer at my grandparents' house in Brownville Junction, and it was formative for me. I made new friends, we rode our bikes everywhere, explored, had fun, and occasionally got into mischief. It was an adventure. That was also when I bought my first *Harvey Comics* comic books, which sparked my imagination the same way that *Peanuts* had a few years before. I began making up my own characters and drawing stories on the blank sides of my retired grandfather's Brownville Junction stationery. I'd staple the pages together and title them *Michaud Comics*. Drawing comics evolved into doing animation years later. It was natural to set this cartoon there, starring a boy who is the age I was then. The cartoon is set around 1960 because that's the era of the silly "buddy" cartoons, like Tom Terrific or Rocky & Bullwinkle, that I want to evoke."

The monster's and the boy's names are also Maine references. John explains, "Percival P. Baxter, Maine's 53rd governor, donated and designated the land around Katahdin as a state park, which bears his name. Then I put my neighbor's name, *Clyde*, after *Baxter* and it had a nice ring to it."

MAKING THE FILM (continued)

After the script was written, Kate recorded her lines of dialogue at John's home art studio in Old Orchard Beach, Maine. Her stage experience prepared her well for performing Baxter's overly dramatic dialogue and the Ant's upper-crust affectations. Veteran voice actor Byron Wagner, a cousin of John's brother-in-law, offered to record other characters voices, which he was able to do remotely from his home studio in California. John says, "Byron has been doing narration and inventing character voices for years. He already had a range of vocalizations that were perfect for a cartoon duck." Byron tried out Percival's dialogue in a few different voices, including one like comic performer Arnold Stang that John found sidesplittingly funny, however they decided that the deep, gravelly voice you hear Byron use in the finished cartoon conveyed Percival's extreme range of emotions the best of any. That voice and Byron's old-time-radio Narrator baritone also complement the higher tones of Kate's characterizations of Baxter and the Ant.

The next task was to establish the cartoon's visual style. John, and his artist wife Didi Reisky, whose hands make two live-action cameos in the film, have been good friends with artist Rhonda Conley since their shared years at Humongous Entertainment. "We're longtime fans of Rhonda's paintings and hoped she would take on the role of background artist," John says.

"Rhonda agreed to look at the mid-century children's book illustrations and cartoon backgrounds I'd collected for inspiration, and then paint three different trees of her own design. What she sent us were sophisticated and beautifully stylized. We loved them, and she enjoyed painting them, so she agreed to be the background stylist and painter. I set about revising and refining the characters so that they looked at home in the world Rhonda was creating." John also wanted his character animation to be worthy of the beautiful environments they would be in. He explains, "I was experienced animating cartoon kids from my eight years at Humongous Entertainment. Ducks were a new thing for me, though. I wanted Clyde to have cartoony expressions and reactions, but be recognizable as a real duck, so I studied videos of ducks and got to know their skeletal structure. When I had finished designing Clyde and the other main characters, I sculpted clay models of them to refer to when animating."

Brownville Junction looms large in John's family history. His grandfather on his mother's side was a cook for the railroad crews; his paternal grandfather ran the commissary which supplied the cooks; his late parents grew up, got married and bought a house there; and it's where his five older siblings were born. John included things in the cartoon that his brother and five sisters would recognize, such as the three couples standing on the train station platform. They represent their paternal grandparents, parents, and maternal grandparents. Rhonda Conley, who also designed the two girls who walk past Baxter, designed the three couples from John's family photos, and recreated the train station of the early 1900s, from old photos. The boy riding his elaborately decorated, chopper-style bicycle down Main Street is based on a gregarious Brownville Junction resident, the late Eddie Smith. John says, "It was common to see Eddie riding his tricked-out bike through the neighborhood or on the road to and from other towns. He was a fixture of the town and a friend to all, so I wanted to give him a cameo." Rhonda designed the young cartoon version of Eddie and John drew his bicycle based on old photos provided by the Brownville Historical Society.

The spot where Baxter sits and plays ukulele will be recognizable to older Brownville Junction residents as Richardson's store/lunch counter. John says, "It's where I bought those *Harvey* comics that influenced me so much. Originally I had Baxter on the steps of the Post Office."

MAKING THE FILM (continued)

“And then, incredibly, my sister in Portland discovered that she lived directly next door to former Brownville Junction resident Bill Richardson, whose family had owned Richardson’s store! I told him about the cartoon I was making, and he offered me his early 1960s photos of their store and the adjacent buildings, which became fantastic drawing references.”

For the objects that Clyde transforms into, John wanted to use things that had belonged to his grandparents. Among the heirlooms he and his siblings had kept were a 1940s egg beater, a 1950s rotary telephone, and a Canadian souvenir moose statue. John photographed those and put them in the film. Other props came from antique shops and online auctions.

And then there’s the real-life origin of Baxter’s “house”. John explains, “One day when I was planning the introductory backstory of the cartoon, my father happened to have out a photo of his parents standing on a caboose platform, young and happy. My dad explained that that was where they lived while their first house was being built. Of course, I had to make Baxter’s house a caboose then! Rhonda did a great job designing the caboose-home, the yard, and everything else in the Intro, from my simple “floor-plan” of the yard and photo references I had collected.”

John says, “The cartoon has around fifty shots, each with at least some animation, and I pushed myself to do the absolute best I could on each one. Because of that, I became a better designer and animator over the span of the project. I’m a novice character designer, but with practice I improved and learned to do better character designs. More than once I even changed a feature of a character after having animated them in several scenes. It was inevitable on a years-long project like this where I was learning and improving. Most of the scenes I’d animated once didn’t look very good to me a year later, so I redid them all. But I love animating these characters, so it was fun and not laborious.”

“Near the end of the project I hired the Portland, Maine design firm, NASHBOX to create the main title card, and I’m delighted with the results. It’s fun, and exudes warmth and friendliness. Lastly, I sent the edited film to Todd Smith, a friend and musician whose short orchestral piece, ‘Factotum’ I had illustrated with abstract animation years earlier.” Todd, who had never composed a soundtrack for a cartoon before, created seven and one half minutes of vibrant music and sounds inspired by the Warner Brothers and MGM cartoon scores of Carl Stalling and Scott Bradley. John says, “The soundtrack propels the story right along, and accentuates all the little dramatic and comedic moments. I think it’s remarkable.”

HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE USED

Wacom Cintiq tablet and *Toon Boom Animate Pro 2 (now Harmony)* for character animation.
Canon Powershot TX1 camera for live action video in the cafe and still photos of the objects that Clyde turns into.

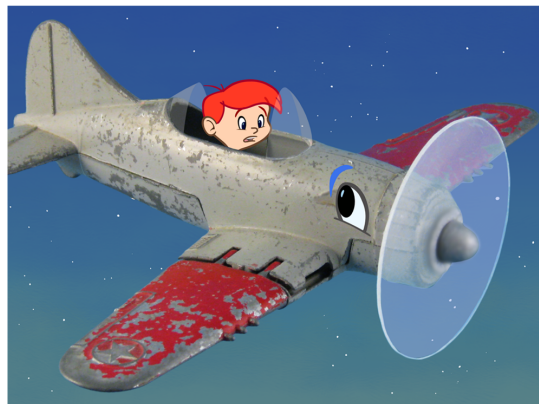
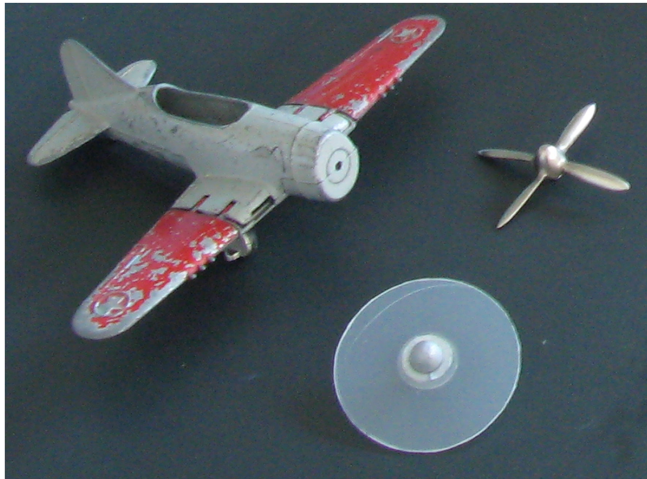
Adobe Photoshop for background art & prop photo touch-up.

Google SketchUp for Rhonda Conley’s 3d model of Baxter’s caboose home and yard, from which screenshots were taken and used as layouts.

Apple Final Cut Pro for compiling the scenes of animation and Todd Smith’s audio mix, and for adding scene transitions.

THE EVOLUTION OF CLYDE AS EMERGENCY TRANSPORTATION

from earliest storyboard scribble to finished frame of animation



BIOGRAPHIES



JOHN MICHAUD (Story, Screenplay, Direction, Animation, Prop Photography, Live Action Video)

John spent much of his early years in southern Maine drawing cartoon characters and writing stories around them. In 1995 he animated Clippy the paperclip Help Assistant for Microsoft Office 97. After eight years as an animator at Humongous Entertainment in Seattle, he returned to Maine, where he enjoys the occasional Maine wild blueberry pancake.



BYRON WAGNER (Voices of Narrator, Percival, & Clyde)

Byron has been acting professionally since he was eight, doing voiceover since age 13 (both, a very long time ago), and implemented (& patented) the first ISDN audio codec for Disney in '92. He enjoys crafting memorable results for global animation, video game, audiobook, narration, and commercial clients from his world-class Abaton AirBnB/studios in Los Angeles & Tirat Tzvi, Israel, and travels extensively. He's also the creator of the Abaton VO Calendar. SAG-AFTRA. Repped by DDO.



KATE MICHAUD (Voices of Baxter & Ant)

Kate Michaud has been acting since she was Baxter's age. She studied at Connecticut College and The Strasberg Institute and performed in New York City theater for six years. After a brief stint caring for monkeys and manatees in Belize, Kate returned to her home state of Maine to teach second grade, do improv, and enjoy nature.

BIOGRAPHIES **continued**



RHONDA CONLEY (Background Art)

Rhonda Conley is a native Montanan who grew up on a diet of sunshine and Saturday morning cartoons. She studied fine art and graphic design, but early in her career lucked into a home creating art for electronic games and education. She currently resides in Everett, Washington. Rhonda continues to paint watercolors and draw for fun, and her inspirations include food, horses, the natural world, and the Seattle Mariners.



TODD SMITH (Music & Sound Design)

Todd Smith is a musician and composer from California residing in Ajijic, Mexico.

SONG QUOTES IN SOUNDTRACK

Brahms Lullaby (public domain)

Performed by Todd Smith

The Man on the Flying Trapeze (public domain)

Performed by Todd Smith

I've Been Working on the Railroad (public domain)

Solo ukulele version performed by John Michaud

Orchestral version performed by Todd Smith