

The Last Christmas

NARRATED BY JOHN CLEESE



Cor Anglais
PRODUCTIONS

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY DAVID SCHINBECKLER ANIMATION AND COMPOSITING BY LOGAN SCHINBECKLER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY EMMA WILSON READ BY JOHN CLEESE MUSIC BY SHAWN PITZEL
ORIGINAL MUSIC BY DAVID SCHINBECKLER AUDIO BY MARK HOOD



[HTTPS://THELASTCHRISTMAS.CA](https://thelastchristmas.ca)

The Last Christmas

== PRESS

KIT ==

== SYNOPSIS ==



On a moonlit Christmas eve, Gramps is sitting by the fire in his workshop on Manitoulin Island, in Canada, when suddenly the building is shaken by a loud crash. He rushes outside to discover Santa Claus, his battered sleigh, frightened reindeer, and gifts scattered in the snow.

Shaken but uninjured, Santa joins Gramps in his shop to decide what to do. Over a wee dram, Gramps is shocked to learn that Santa has shut down his workshop, laid off the elves, and that this is his very last Christmas delivery before he and Mrs. Claus retire to someplace sunny and warm.

But something must be done to save THIS Christmas Day, so Gramps comes up with a plan. He offers to install his freshly-rebuilt Jaguar engine into Santa's sleigh, but that presents another problem - what to do with the reindeer.

Gramps points out that Manitoulin, with its huge deer population and pristine forests, would be the perfect place for the reindeer to retire. Santa and the reindeer agree, and in a bittersweet parting, the reindeer soar into the moonlit evening to explore their new home.

Now comes the hard part - rebuilding the sleigh. As they roll up their sleeves and set to work, Gramps learns that Santa's retirement is more forced than voluntary. An evil software company has developed a smartphone app that will replace Santa Claus. And it gets worse. Their legal department has trademarked his name and threatened to arrest him if he continues to use it.

St. Nick's bitterness fills the shop but as Gramps listens to this sad tale, the door opens and in walks his 6-year-old grandson, Davey, who's still half asleep. But not for long. The sight of Santa Claus lights up Davey's face and he rushes to his open arms. Their smiles illuminate the whole room and extinguish Santa's dreary mood.

After Davey departs the shop for his warm bedroom, Santa and Gramps set to work on the sleigh with renewed vigor and soon it is all repaired and fitted with its sparkling new engine. Time to shove it outside and into the snow.

With the sleigh loaded up and ready for flight, Gramps gives Santa a quick lesson on the controls for his hopped-up ride. Each man takes a pull off of Gramps' flask and after hugs and goodbyes, Santa hits the starter button. Nothing happens. The engine is a dud, and with the reindeer already dispersed to the four winds, Santa is stuck here and this Christmas is well and truly ruined for the entire planet.

Just kidding.

The engine rolls over and roars into life and shoots the sleigh upwards and into the night. Santa Claus delivers his presents in record time and Christmas is saved. For the last time.

== LOGLINE ==

Prodded into retirement by a nagging wife and an evil software conglomerate, Santa Claus and his reindeer, on their very last run, accidentally crash into a remote Canadian workshop where he and the elderly owner struggle to repair the damaged sleigh and save Christmas day.



I wrote *The Last Christmas* in October/November of 2015. The idea came to me in the shower one evening after supper. I must have inadvertently overstimulated some hair follicles that are directly attached to the portion of my brain where all the cynicism lives.

Ever since the Dutch brought Sinterklaas to North America over 300 years ago, he has suffered numerous indignities and cultural transformations. But if one could sit down with Santa, today, over a pint down at the corner bar, what would he have to say about his metamorphosis into merely a marketing tool? Quite a bit, I suspect. And so *The Last Christmas* became my own little sleigh ride, wherein I could conjure up a jaded, but not yet defeated Santa Claus, all the while chuckling merrily away to myself at my immunity from those pesky fact-checkers that seem to ruin everything.

I regularly read *The Last Christmas* at holiday gatherings with family and friends for several years. My tiny audiences seemed to enjoy the story, and encouraged me to do something with it. Maybe a picture book, or a magazine article, or a serialized newspaper story - some vehicle that would bring it to a wider audience. I was appreciative, but skeptical.

In 2019 I sold a piece of property and sat down with my oldest son, Logan, who has been in the animation business for 25 years. "What would it take," I mused, "to turn *The Last Christmas* into an animated short?" His answer, distilled from several telephone conversations, was "Money and bravery."

Fine. I have never done anything remotely like this before, nor have I ever been accused of being able to figure out when I was in over my head. I might very well produce and direct a very expensive turkey. Or, I could sit back and watch my bank account accumulate interest while my arteries harden. Hmmm. I'll have the turkey, thank you.

It didn't take long to assemble a production crew, thanks to my high school years at the Interlochen Arts Academy, a top-flight boarding school whose graduates populate every corner of the art world. Mark Hood, who has worked with everybody from Bob Dylan to The Canadian Brass, agreed to handle the audio end. Emma Wilson, daughter of my IAA roommate Glen, is a gifted digital artist whose work can be found across the web. And then there's the brains of the outfit, my son Logan, who can stitch everything together.

But not so fast. *The Last Christmas* is fundamentally an epic poem, written in anapestic tetrameter (go ahead, look it up - I'll wait). Who is going to narrate it? Not me. My voice is thin and nasal, and I have no theatrical training whatsoever. I had to find a professional narrator with a commanding voice and dramatic credentials. And affordable. And available. How hard could it be?

I made a wish list, checked it twice, and very near the top was John Cleese.

Lo and behold, I received a phone call on the evening of January 15, 2021, from London, England. On the other end of the line was Richard Norris, John Cleese's personal assistant, advising me that John had read the script,



Ludwig van Bathrobe, composer, author, and coffee addict.

enjoyed it, and can we make a deal. Slowly, one brain cell at a time, I realized that this was for real and three minutes later we had agreed on the fee. Thank you and good night.

My brain exploded. I had just secured the services of one of the most consequential comedic minds of our time, and a personal hero. But perhaps more importantly, this here nobody, living on a gravel road on an island in Lake Huron, had just been awarded a huge vote of confidence which I had been hesitant to grant to myself. It is one thing to absorb the compliments of family and friends after a few egg nogs around the fireplace. But with John Cleese willing to lend his name and his towering talent to *The Last Christmas*, for the very first time I allowed myself to believe that maybe I had something here.

Richard Norris suggested a recording date in the second week of March, 2021, when John would be in Phoenix, Arizona and with some time on his hands. Sneaky Big Recording Studio was nearby, and John had recorded there before. Could I Zoom in remotely to direct? I readily agreed, but there was a problem.

I was in St. Lucia, which had just been hit with its first outbreak of Covid 19, and found myself holed up in a quarantine hotel in Rodney Bay. I went to the office of the Bay Gardens Resort to see what kind of internet service they had available. As luck would have it, the manager, Cheryl, is a graduate of the University of Toronto and a huge Python fan. When I told her what I wanted to do, her jaw dropped and she rolled out the red carpet. After a phone call her tech guy came over and gave me access to the admin side of her fibre optic network and a private room in the hotel conference center. My laptop was smiling and so was I.

The session was slated for 1pm on March 12. I was terrified. I needn't have been. John was cordial, relaxed, accommodating, and a complete pro. We finished in three hours.

I downloaded and reviewed the audio files that evening. Everything was there. A hundred things could have gone wrong, but didn't. Time for a celebratory beverage! I strolled down to the hotel bar for a drink. It was closed.

With John Cleese's marvelous reading in the can, I dispatched a flurry of emails to the crew and slammed the project into high gear. Unfortunately, high gear was not particularly fast. *The Last Christmas* has been nobody's day job and it has taken over four years to complete. But it turned out far better than any of us had anticipated. I hope you agree.

"A unique and gritty take on a Christmas classic...a Christmas to remember."

- Warren Schlote, *The Manitoulin Expositor*



THE CREW



David Schinbeckler is a musician, carpenter, and writer living with his partner, Marg, near Mindemoya, on Manitoulin Island in Ontario, Canada. Dave grew up in northern Indiana, in a family obsessed with art, music, and fast cars. He took up the oboe at age nine and at age eleven was accepted at the National Music Camp at Interlochen, Michigan, where he earned several scholarships to attend the Interlochen Arts Academy, graduating with honors in 1970.

In 1972 Dave moved to Bloomington, Indiana, became engrossed in the burgeoning music scene there, and learned the fundamentals of studio recording over the shoulder of Interlochen classmate Mark Hood at Gilfoy's Sound Studios. He supported himself with a brisk business in guitar repair, and later as a sound reinforcement tech for The Screaming Gypsy Bandits, Felix, Return to Forever, and the Billy Cobham - George Duke Band.

In 1976 Dave and his wife moved to Manitoulin Island, where he was employed by Cambrian College to teach instrumental music in the public schools. Dave has written for *The Manitoulin Expositor*, *Chatelaine Magazine*, and CBC Radio. He has been retired for ten years now and enjoys carpentry, writing, and cruising the North Channel of Lake Huron with Marg.

Emma Wilson (1990) is a Dutch illustrator who lives on the edge of the city Groningen, so she can enjoy the buzz of city life, but also walk right into nature where she finds so much of her inspiration. She grew up in a musical and creative family, loving animals and drawing them all day, every day. She started to get some serious commissions from the age of 14, and as soon as she finished high school (Drachtster Lyceum) she went straight to art academy Minerva in Groningen. She studied design and illustration, and graduated in 2011.

Emma designs board games, birth announcement cards, promotional gifts, murals, you name it. She has done projects for Pax for Peace, ICAN, University Medical Center Groningen, Provincie Friesland, Brunel Energy, Museum aan de A, Drents Museum, and many other companies and organizations, as well as commissions for private customers.

The enormous variety in assignments is what she loves most about her profession. She has found working on *The Last Christmas* deeply satisfying.



www.emmawilson.nl
[@emmawilsonillustrator](https://www.instagram.com/emmawilsonillustrator)

THE CREW



Logan Schinbeckler has spent two decades as an artist, director and creator across multiple entertainment industries. After getting his start as a traditional animator and composer, Logan worked in a variety of creative and leadership roles on award winning television shows, mobile apps, and video games. His talents have been tapped by several Ottawa-area studios, including Pip Animation Services, Bitheads, Jam Filled Entertainment, and Sphere Entertainment. Creative credits include *Gerald McBoing-Boing*, *The Ripping Friends*, *The Ren & Stimpy Show*, *Curious George*, and the animated feature film, *Pirate's Passage*.

Logan is currently an Associate Creative Director with Immersive International, an experiential design firm that specializes in creating media and interactive experiences for private companies, governments, and cultural institutions around the world. In his free time he enjoys walks with his partner, Stephanie, dissecting sci-fi movies, and creating alternative universes with Lego.

<https://www.biglogan.com/>

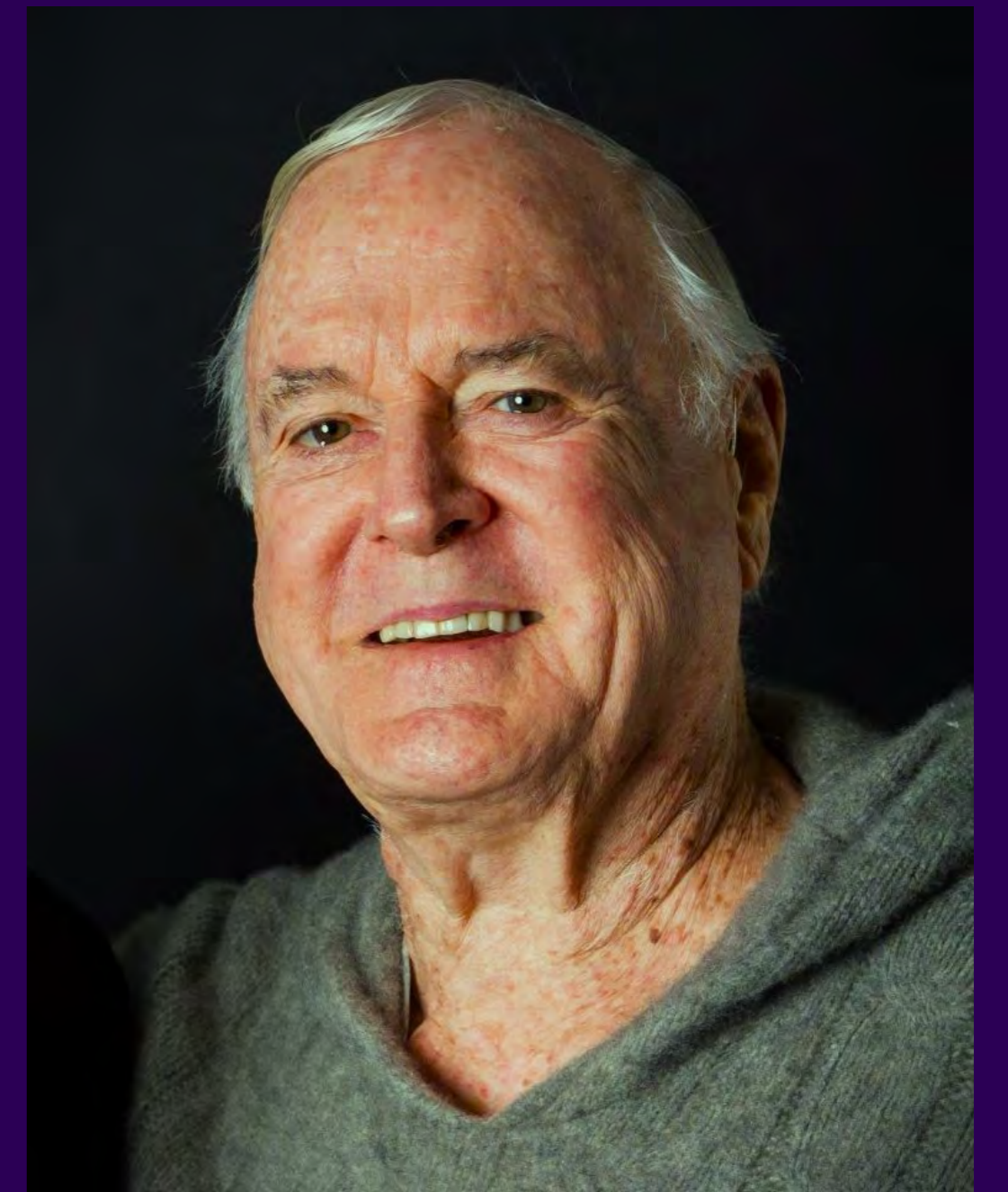
John Cleese is best known for his roles in *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, *Fawlty Towers*, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, and *A Fish Called Wanda*.

In addition to his comedic activities, he was a co-founder with Sir Antony Jay of Video Arts, a management and sales training video company. Over a period of 20 yrs, Video Arts made over 120 training videos, and it was the largest firm of its kind outside the United States.

John Cleese was a co-author, with the eminent psychiatrist Dr. Robin Skynner of two books 'Families And How To Survive Them', and 'Life And How To Survive It'. These books, which explored psychology, psychiatry, and their application to the wider world, both became best sellers.

He wrote his first autobiography 'So Anyway', which was published in 2014 and has sold 600,000 copies worldwide. In 2020, he also penned 'Creativity: A short and cheerful guide'.

In his twilight years he passes his time writing film scripts, making speeches to business audiences, doing seminars on creativity, teaching at Cornell and constructing a virtual reality. In 2024, he also directed the West End stage production of *Fawlty Towers*.



Mark Hood's body of work as a record producer, audio engineer and sound designer, includes over 500 LP, CD and DVD releases in all genres of music. He has produced and recorded music for Emmy award-winning television specials, feature films and documentaries, and jingles and advertising tracks for hundreds of national clients.

For the theater, he is the sound designer for Tony award-winning musical productions on Broadway, in London's West End as well as international and national touring productions. He has collaborated with a wide variety of artists including Bob Dylan, Charles Mingus, James Taylor, the Washington Winds, Joshua Bell, the Cincinnati Pops, Diana Ross, John Scofield, John Mellencamp, David Sanborn, Dick Vitale, Sandi Patty, Rodney Dangerfield, George Benson, Odetta, Canadian Brass and many others.

He enjoys swimming in Lake Michigan and long walks in the woods with his wife, Chris.

https://www.discogs.com/artist/452608-Mark-Hood?srsltid=AfmBOorWA_tHoaKCr9QiHXH3KhJMhh_LMm8iJT_p0p9FhLfsAaTW8RWF

Shawn Pitzel fell in love with the Hammond B3 over 50 years ago. She's been his mistress ever since and has brought him on a lifelong journey of musical discovery. From the early 70s he was driven by a passion to master his chosen musical love and went on to perform for years in various professional bands in a wide variety of styles. He continues to perform regularly in multiple genres.

In the 80s Shawn founded and built Mission Studios and went on to engineer, produce, arrange and perform on many diverse projects. These projects ran the gamut of most of the things a professional keyboard player would be required to do and many pushed him to do things that were outside his comfort zone. The result is a musician today that has a wide palette of styles and ideas to draw from.

<https://ca.linkedin.com/in/shawn-pitzel-a804964>

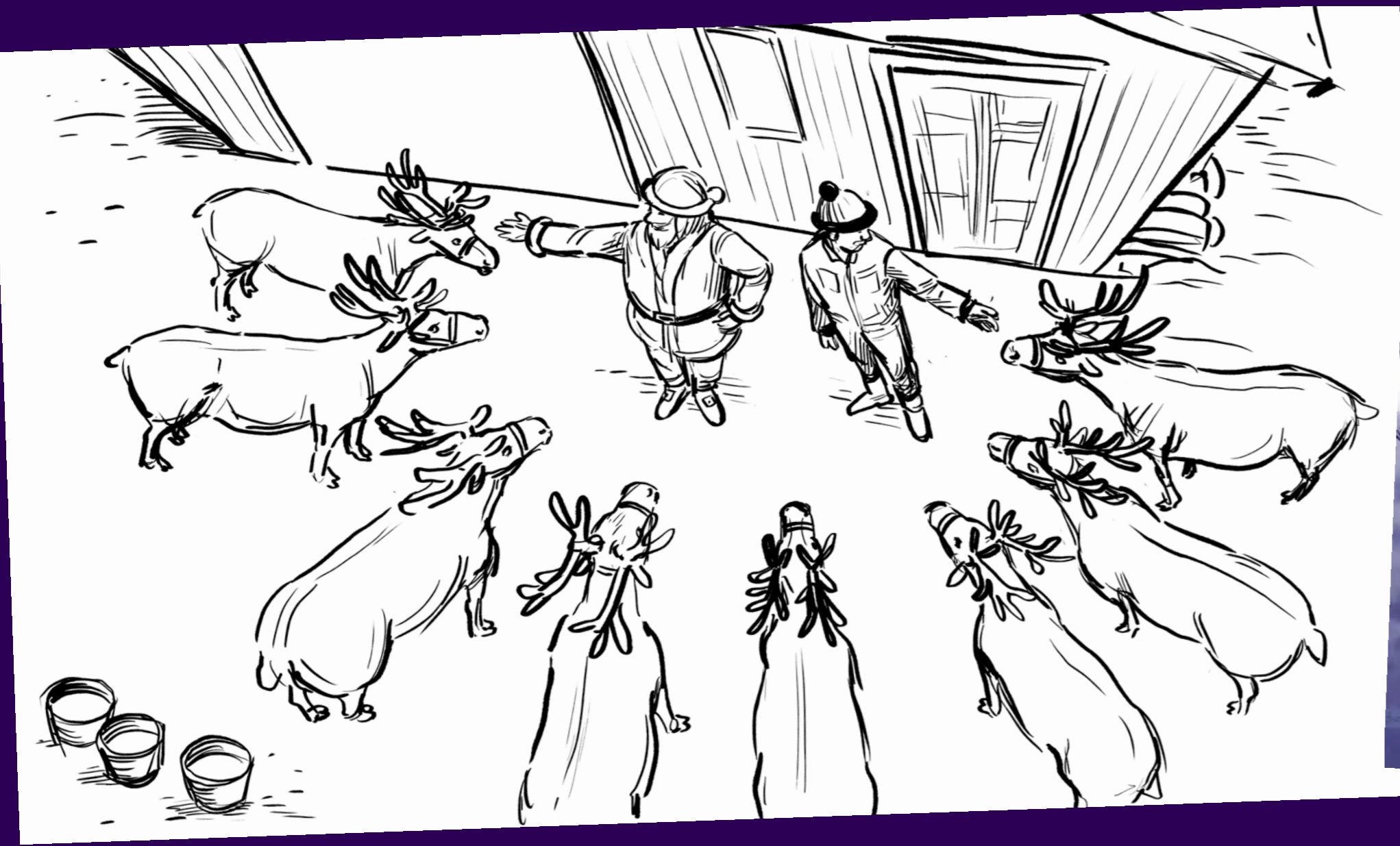


"John Cleese is beyond great."
- John Sheard

SCREEN SHOTS

Storyboard

Illustration



"Guns, blowtorches, profanity, - *The Last Christmas*
has everything you could ask for in a Christmas story!"
- *Tinker Bell*

≡ C R E D I T S ≡

writer, director, producer David Schinbeckler
storyboard, illustrations Emma Wilson
compositing, animation Logan Schinbeckler
narration John Cleese
music supervision, audio Mark Hood
music arrangement, piano Shawn Pitzel
original incidental music David Schinbeckler
intro and extro music Leon Redbone
lap steel guitar David Lanham
photography Dan Goulet
remote recording engineer Mike Hissong
music supervision Jody Colero
Warren Bray
creative consultants Susie Moloney
Margaret Hamilton
Ian Boothby
Jose Pou



John encouraging photographer Dan Goulet to make him look good.



Dan making John look good.



John teaching solicitor Cheryl Grossman how to fly.



There's one in every crowd....

≡ T E C H N I C A L ≡

Title	The Last Christmas
Language	English
Run time	25:24
Screener video format	1080p x 720p
Screener video bitrate	8000Kbps
Screener frame rate	24fps
Screener container	MP4, H.264
DCP video format	3840p x 2160p
Aspect ratio	16:9
Color	color
Audio format	2-channel stereo
Audio bitrate	128 Kbps
Audio encoding	AAC



FISHING • YACHTING • CAMPING • HUNTING

"Published Weekly On the Largest Freshwater Island In The World"

Vol. 145, No. 35 \$1.90 + GST

Little Current, Ontario

Wednesday, January 8, 2025

Dave Schinbeckler's new take on 'Night Before Christmas' lands a major star

John Cleese of 'Monty Python' fame narrates short film

by Warren Schlote

MINDEMOYA—Unlikely combinations can sometimes lead to some of the best stories, and Islander Dave Schinbeckler is betting on that rule in his animated short-film project, 'The Last Christmas.'

The premise of this film may appear unlikely, indeed – it's rooted in an iconic Christmas story, but features a despondent Santa Claus, Manitoulin Island and a legendary actor as narrator. Over the past four years, Mr. Schinbeckler has been gradually weaving those threads together in a way that just seems to fit.

In fact, it was the unique and gritty take on a Christmas classic that helped Mr. Schinbeckler score some major star power for his film. View-



After crashing his sleigh into a Manitoulin home, Santa warms himself by the fire with a glass of Scotch and a chat with "Gramps."

...continued on page 10

PAGE 10 — THE MANITOULIN EXPOSITOR

Wednesday, January 8, 2025

...Schinbeckler's new take on 'Night Before Christmas' lands a major star

...continued from page 3

ers will quickly recognize the voice of comedic actor John Cleese, of Monty Python fame, as the narrator of this tale.

"It's huge. It's the reason we pushed ahead with this project," Mr. Schinbeckler says.

Now, 'The Last Christmas' is nearing completion, and its creator has big plans for the coming year. It's a riff on the 201-year-old classic poem 'The Night Before Christmas' (which is actually titled 'A Visit from St. Nicholas'). Mr. Schinbeckler's version, however, is intended for an older audience.

"It's not a children's piece," laughs Mr. Schinbeckler. "There's a bit of profanity, there are some references in there, so it's for an older audience."

'The Last Christmas' opens on a grandfather sitting in his workshop, trying to find a last-minute gift for his grandson. Even after scouring the classified pages of The Expositor, he's left without any options on the eve of Christmas. Suddenly, a disenchanted Santa Claus crashes onto the scene, ready to hang up his reins after a long career on rooftops around the world.

The two decide to work together to find solutions to both of their problems, and they end up creating a Christmas to remember.

The entire script of the film is written in rhyming verse in a nod to 'The

Night Before Christmas,' even matching the triplet feel of the original poem. (Mr. Schinbeckler says that rhyming triplet rhythm is called anapestic tetrameter, if you need a fun fact for your next Christmas cocktail party.)

Mr. Schinbeckler says the idea of creating this project began about a decade ago as a "shower thought." He put a rough version of his script onto paper over the following month, but it remained on the shelf for a long time.

It was four years ago now that he decided to finally work on this project, which had been stubbornly staying in the back of his mind. 'The Last Christmas' is entirely self-funded on a bare-bones budget, with plenty of work offered in-kind by his creative team.

The script is deeply rooted on Manitoulin Island, with plenty of local references—the massive deer population, cedar trees, Mindemoya and, of course, this newspaper, to name a few. The look of Santa Claus himself is even loosely based on Expositor publisher emeritus Rick McCutcheon, whose image in a Santa cap was captured by Mr. Schinbeckler in various poses and sent to his illustration team.

"I've been here for 40 years, and the story just seemed to fit what I was trying to say, about the consequences of Santa Claus being put up against modern electronic life,"



Logan, left, and Dave Schinbeckler flank John Cleese of Monty Python fame. Mr. Cleese is the narrator of the Schinbeckler take on the 'Night Before Christmas.'

Mr. Schinbeckler says.

He says it was also important for him to show off a character who can do a bit of everything, from being a mechanic to producing fine art. That's a quality he says he's seen a lot among the people of Manitoulin Island.

Mr. Schinbeckler, who has a musical background, taught music in Northern Ontario communities for many years. In fact, much of the soundtrack to the film are original compositions that he wrote or co-wrote and recorded with friends, including Sudbury's Shawn Pitzel.

"They're all people that I have known and worked with over the years," he says.

The whole project owes its existence to those kind gestures of people he's met through the years. The audio mixer, Mark Hood, is a former high school classmate who has built a rich career around the world as a recording engineer.

His son Logan edited the piece, and brings decades of experience in the animation industry. Illustrator Emma Wilson, based in Netherlands, is the daughter of one of Mr. Schinbeckler's former roommates. And those are just some of the many skilled people who have helped put this project together.

But the standout feature of this film, according to Mr. Schinbeckler, is John Cleese's narration track.

"It was a fluke of the universe," he says. "Before we even started this project, I knew we were going to have to find somebody of some repute and skill to read it."

He made a long list of people he would like to have working on the project, ranked them from most- to least-likely to say yes, and then started at the least-likely end.

David Attenborough, known for his narration of nature documentaries,

took the number-one spot, despite Mr. Schinbeckler knowing he'd never hear back from him.

The second spot, however, seemed to be a much better fit. Mr. Cleese could also deliver a dynamic performance in a familiar British accent, and his career has featured plenty of comedic and entertaining roles. Mr. Schinbeckler says he felt the casting was too perfect to ever work out in real life.

That is, until January 15, 2021, when his phone rang, announcing a call from London, England. It was Mr. Cleese's personal assistant, informing him that Mr. Cleese had read the script, enjoyed it, and wanted to take part. After some budget negotiations, they had a deal.

"It just goes to show you, you never know unless you ask," says Mr. Schinbeckler.

Mr. Schinbeckler says he thinks the gritty, warts-and-all characters in the script are what caught Mr. Cleese's attention.

"He's 82 now, he doesn't have to do anything he doesn't want to do," says Mr. Schinbeckler. "It's precisely because of its irreverence I think that it appealed to John."

That feeling of irreverence toward a classic Christmas tale seemed to work well at a private test-screening in Little Current last month for Expositor staffers. There were plenty of laughs and Mr. Schinbeckler says the audience seemed engaged

throughout the full 25-minute runtime.

After securing the likes of Mr. Cleese, Mr. Schinbeckler's ambitions have only grown. There won't be any screenings until next year's holiday season at the earliest, because he's holding out for a premiere at the biggest film stage in Canada: The Toronto International Film Festival.

He knows it's quite a long shot. He's hoping to get into the Canadian productions category, and by his numbers, last year there were only a couple of projects chosen out of more than 60 submissions.

"I've certainly never done anything like this before, but I had a really good team and I figured, well, let's just see if I can do it," Mr. Schinbeckler says.

TIFF is considered one of the 'big five' film festivals on the planet, so once again, Mr. Schinbeckler is aiming high. He says he's waiting to see if he can beat the odds again and make the cut, and will then start applying to other festivals.

"If 'The Last Christmas' wins something at TIFF, I will hire a marching band and we'll have a parade," he says.

The film is nearly complete, save for some missing background music, and Mr. Schinbeckler says he hopes to have everything finished by the time TIFF submissions open in March.

≡ CONTACT ≡

Cor Anglais Productions
RR1, 436 Elliot Road
Mindemoya
Ontario P0P 1S0
Canada

705-377-4887

info@thelastchristmas.ca

www.thelastchristmas.ca

Cor Anglais
PRODUCTIONS