

Eric Schwartz Interview - 2008



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Hello Eric, I really appreciate you taking the time to do this interview. I have enjoyed your work from way back in the 80's when I was still a kid. I'm glad your still doing your thing.

For people who don't know who you are, could you tell us about yourself and what you do?

My name is Eric Schwartz, and I currently work in the freelance illustration field. I'm not sure there's much I can do to elaborate on that.

You have always had fans in the Amiga community based from your past animations on the Amiga, your support for the Amiga computer and Amy the Squirrel. I enjoyed your Aerotoons in the 80's myself. Your recent animation was very inspirational. What made you decide to create your recent animation that is on YouTube?

It all started with the song "Still Alive" written by Jonathan Coulton for the ending sequence of the game "Portal". (Ironically, I don't own or play the game, though I did buy the music) The lyrics are by a computer (the enemy in

the game) singing about itself being defeated, but still very passive-aggressive and defiant about it, which seemed to fit the attitude behind the Amiga and its users. I started thinking more and more about how an Amiga-themed animation might work to that song, until it became an idea that would not rest until I had produced it.

I went through a lot of experimentation and trial-and-error to design the method of the animation. The main thing was I wanted to be able to work quickly, as three minutes of full animation with lip-synced vocals could take months if not years to complete if you don't have a staff working for you. The result was a mix of 3D and drawn animation designed to make the most of black and white line work. It could have looked more refined, but I was able to put the whole thing together in a little under two months.

Still Alive Animation

Do you have any other plans to do more with the Amiga computer character you used in the recent animation?

I don't have any specific plans yet, but I would like to do more with her, as I have put a lot into the development of the character, and the Lightwave objects that help make her up.

Do you have any other animations planned?

Pretty much the same answer as the previous question. I would like to do more hobby animation work like I used to. It's just a matter of finding the free time and the inspiration for new projects, as well as taking the time to teach myself to use newer animation software on newer systems.

What are the specifications of the Amiga you used to create the recent animation?

I use an A4000T with a 68060, CybergraphX 64 video card, 128 mb RAM, and a 9 gig SCSI hard drive.

I still use the Amiga for much of the graphics work that I do, along with a Pegasos 2 running MorphOS, a Mac, and a laptop running Linux.

What software do you use to create your animations?

On the "Still Alive" animation I used the following:

Photon Cel Animator (a very old program, but still useful for breaking down and reading audio tracks for lip-sync purposes)

Lightwave 3D v5 (for modeling and rendering the 3D elements of the animation)

Disney Animation Studio (for drawing the 2D line animation elements)

DeluxePaint 4 AGA (for extra animated effects and finishing touches)

Axiom ANIM Workshop (for converting anim files between formats)

For the final compilation and saving I used a Mac, but the files are not too demanding for most Amiga's to play directly, so I'm looking into options for an Amiga-playable version.

Most of my 'classic' animations made heavy use of a program called **"Moviesetter"** from Gold Disk, which was valuable for making complex animations with sound using relatively small amounts of memory or file space.

Do you still keep up with Amiga happenings?

Perhaps not as well as I probably should, but I try to.

What are your thoughts on the current state of the Amiga?

I think there are still a lot of good people doing good work out there, but it's definitely at a low point. Hopefully the community can find a way to move forward from here.

If you could buy a new Amiga type of computer tomorrow, could you describe what you would want it to be like?

My experiences with systems like the Pegasos and with emulation have shown me how strong and fast the Amiga and Amiga-style operating systems can be when put together with the kind of processor power and RAM/storage found on even a low-end system today. I'm not picky about exactly what hardware is used, as long as it works. What I would really like is to see an Amiga-like operating system become a strong alternative platform with a good software and development base behind it, like the various flavors of Linux. With its open architecture, I've mentioned various places that I feel AROS has the best chance of achieving that goal.

Did you ever see anything happen from The Amiga Grassroots Campaign you initiated many years ago?

Over the years, I've seen my Amiga "Survivor" image reused a lot in various places, but I haven't noticed anything more ambitious than that - not that I was shooting for anything that high-profile to start with.



You created the mascot Kitty for AROS. How did that happen? What made you decide to use a cat for the mascot?

As I recall, I was asked to draw a cat character, so I wasn't the one who made that decision.

Kitty still remains the AROS mascot after all these years. However, we only have a couple of poses of her. Would you consider possibly drawing her in a few other poses for us some day?

It's a matter of finding the time with my normal work load, but I really should.

AROS has come a long way. Have you checked it out lately?

I've been watching with interest, and intend to make AROS one of the multiple operating systems on my laptop. I've been hoping to see some 680x0 emulation and 'legacy' software compatibility, as that would quickly put AROS on an equal or better footing next to Amiga OS4 and MorphOS, at least for me.

I always enjoyed the fact that Sabrina was an Amiga fan in your Sabrina-Online comic. Do you think there is any chance we might see Kitty make an appearance in Sabrina-Online?

I hadn't thought of that before, but it's a possibility.

Could you take us through the process you use to create a Sabrina-Online comic strip?

Each strip starts with an idea and a layout sketch to rough it out. The comic strips are mostly drawn by hand, pencil, ink, and lettering. The final comic line-art is scanned on the Amiga, and the titles and other finishing touches are added with Cloanto's Personal Paint. The graphics are scaled to the sizes used on the website and plugged in for each monthly update.

What projects are you currently working on?

I have my regular website projects, Sabrina Online being the primary ongoing one. Other than that, I'm doing commissioned illustration work for various clients. The most recent work being for Bill Panagouleas of DiscreetFX, for his documentary film "Oil Change".

Have you ever thought about creating a new comic strip with all new characters?

I haven't really. Sabrina Online is mostly a hobby project, and I've put a lot of time and work into the characters and the world they inhabit. I don't think I'm ready to start over from scratch.

You have created some characters for DiscreetFX. What characters have you created for them?

It almost seems like there's too many to count at this point. The majority of the software and art packages from DiscreetFX have some kind of 'pinup mascot' from me connected to them. One particularly memorable example would be "Amizilla", a pinup-girl-style version of Godzilla, as the mascot for the bounty project to port the Mozilla web browser family (Firefox and others) to Amiga OS, MorphOS, and AROS. I enjoy the DiscreetFX projects because they give me the opportunity to be creative and try a lot of different ideas and techniques.



If someone wanted to hire you to do some artwork, what is the best way to contact you?

The easiest way to reach me is to write me at ericschwartz @ woh . rr . com.

I know you're a huge Transformers fan. Did you enjoy last year's movie?

I enjoyed the film very much, though I didn't go see it ten times or more like some people I know.

Would you like to add anything at all?

I like to collect Transformers toys (which is not surprising), and I like to play the 'retro' video games. I often play Atari 2600 and 7800 games, or arcade games with MAME on my Pegasos. Another favorite is "Worms: the Directors Cut" on my Amiga, which I play frequently.

Thanks everyone! And Amiga forever! (Not just the emulator package)

Eric Schwartz

- Sabrina-Online : <http://www.sabrina-online.com/>
- Eric Schwartz Web Site : <http://www.coax.net/people/erics/>
- DiscreetFX : <http://www.discreetfx.com/>
- Oil Change : <http://www.discreetfx.com/OilChange/Site/2008.html>
- Cloanto : <http://www.cloanto.com/>

