

# Guidelive

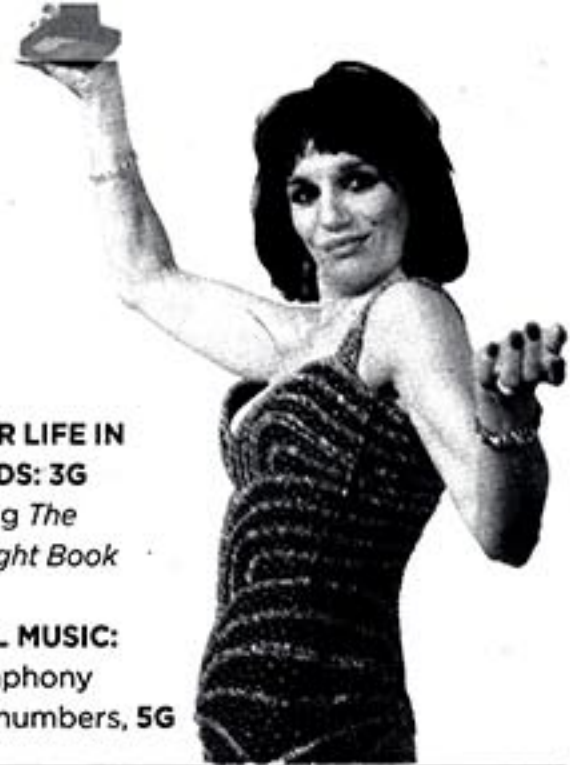
Arts, Culture & Entertainment

## INSIDE

PLAN YOUR LIFE IN  
60 SECONDS: 3G

TV: Reading *The  
Tuesday Night Book  
Club*, 3G

CLASSICAL MUSIC:  
Dallas Symphony  
Orchestra numbers, 5G



GuideLive.com

Tuesday, June 13, 2006



Warner Bros. Pictures

About 100 local workers helped on *The Ant Bully*, which features the voices of Meryl Streep, Julia Roberts and Nicolas Cage.

## TOON TOWN

**MOVIES:** Thriving  
local animation scene  
draws an optimistic picture  
of industry's future

By **CHRIS VOGNAR**  
Staff Critic

PLANO — "This could be Hollywood."

The words sound more hopeful than convincing, and the man who speaks them, Vince Sidwell, seems to know it. As he gives the closing remarks for the fifth annual Industry Giants forum at Collin County Community College's Spring Creek Campus on Saturday, Mr. Sidwell is caught up in the moment.

For this is definitely not Hollywood. It's a gathering of animators and game designers hosted by CCCC and the animation organization A Bunch of Short Guys. But as president of the organization — the biggest short guy, if you will — Mr. Sidwell, a boisterous professor of animation at the University of Texas A&M-Commerce (Universities Center at Dallas), has reason to feel a bit giddy.

That's because the Dallas animation scene is thriving and still rising.

DNA Productions, which started with two guys in a small Lakewood apartment in 1987, will see its second feature, *The Ant Bully*, released by Warner Bros. July 28. (The first, *Jim-*

*my Neutron: Boy Genius*, snagged a 2001 Oscar nomination.) Reel FX has taken on everything from promotions for *Ice Age 2* and *Robots* to Pepsi ads. Janimation is responsible for visual effects in the *Spy Kids* movies and animated shorts at the Mavericks games, among other work. The Art Institute of Dallas, which provided many of the 250 people who worked on *The Ant*

*Bully*, churns out animation and gaming professionals at a Roadrunner-like clip.

So this may not be Hollywood. But right now, it's pretty good to be Dallas.

"You look around and see that this is an industry that doesn't have to be in Hollywood," says Mr. Sidwell. "We have several studios here, and we have a lot of potential. It's all about harnessing it and making sure our potential doesn't leave, and continuing to train and make sure everyone is up to par."

Dallas has many animation lights, but DNA, led by John Davis and Keith Alcorn, shines brightest.

A bearded man with a ponytail, Mr. Davis was the featured attraction at this year's Industry Giants gathering.

See 'CREATIVE' Page 5G

**COMING  
WEDNESDAY:**  
At A-Kon, it's about  
animation fans

## OVER THE TOP

## Says she

"I did it with my dad. I'd sit on his lap and he'd drive. We're country."  
**Britney Spears**, about photos that show her holding infant son Sean Preston as she drove a car, in an interview airing Thursday on NBC's *Today* and *Dateline*



## Fertility count

**Matt Damon** and his wife, **Luciana Bozan**, are the parents of a baby girl, **Isabella**, their first, his publicist said Monday. The baby was born Sunday in a Miami hospital. No more details were released. And **Jason Bateman** (*Arrested Development*) and wife **Amanda Anka** are expecting their first child, according to *US Weekly*.

## Celebrity woe &amp; behold

Custody ugliness abounds as an LA judge asks that a psychologist evaluate whether **Alec Baldwin** is trying to turn 10-year-old daughter **Ireland** against mom **Kim Basinger**. ... Dance-music artist **Kevin Aviance** was attacked Saturday in New York City in an apparent hate crime. He suffered a broken jaw.

## Birthdays

Malcolm McDowell, 63 ... Tim Allen (*Home Improvement*), 53 ... Ally Sheedy, 44 ... Soren Rasted (*Aqua*), 37 ... Raz B (B2K), 21 ... Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, 20

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## DSO ends 2005-06 in black

CLASSICAL MUSIC:  
 Special events offset drop elsewhere

By SCOTT CANTRELL  
 Classical Music Critic

The Dallas Symphony Orchestra is ending the 2005-06 season with a balanced budget and an uptick in overall attendance and ticket revenues. But the news isn't all good. Attendance at classical concerts declined 6 percent, and the annual fund fell 6 percent short of its \$8,025,000 goal.

"What I'm happiest about, first and foremost, is that we'll have the third consecutive year of balanced budgets," says Fred Bronstein, president of the Dallas Symphony Association. "I think that demonstrates good support for the orchestra, and confidence in the community."

Nationally, orchestras took big hits in both attendance and contributions in the years after Sept. 11, 2001, and the recovery has been only gradual. The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra recently announced a big drawdown from its endowment to pay off a \$16 million accumulated deficit.

"I'm pleased with the turnaround in a lot of our ticket sales," Dr. Bronstein says. "Paid attendance will be up 3 percent. We were able to draw in new patrons with our Mozart Festival and special events."

The big growth in ticket sales came in special events including *Star Wars* concerts and appearances by Tony Bennett, Linda Ronstadt, Lang Lang and the 5 Browns. Attendance in this category was up 142 percent, revenue 124 percent. Pops-series attendance was up 8.2 percent and revenues up 11.3 percent.

But classical-series attendance was down 6 percent, and revenues down 1.9 percent. And that's in spite of the presumed excitement of a music-director search and Andrew Litton's final concerts in the job — and a whole minifestival devoted to music of Mozart.

"That's one of the reasons we have gotten very, very aggressive in some of the programming ideas for next year," Dr. Bronstein says.

Classical offerings for 2006-07 include a film-and-music presentation of *Battleship Potemkin*, light shows choreographed for Scriabin's *Prometheus* and Respighi's *Pines of Rome*, and a narrated presentation of Beethoven's complete incidental music for *Egmont*. And the DSO is inaugurating a new Casual Fridays series.

"Our ability to increase classical attendance is probably targeted more on the diversity we can offer, trying things that will be different and popular with audiences," Dr. Bronstein says. "It's an issue that many orchestras grapple with these days."

## 'Creative cocoon' exists locally

Continued from Page 1G

He was also the only presenter with a major Hollywood feature to showcase, even if it wasn't made in Hollywood.

## Bully for DNA

The clips he showed Saturday were impressive on many levels. The test sequences showed how early character sketches evolve into the fully textured computer-generated images that audiences will see when the movie opens. And the finished scenes combined eye-popping detail with engaging storytelling.

Based on a children's book brought to DNA by co-producer Tom Hanks, *The Ant Bully* weaves a lesson about bullying into a fantasy-adventure story. Young Lukas, a bespectacled target of neighborhood bullies, takes out his frustrations on the ant colony in his yard (a water-hose attack is depicted as an insect catastrophe of biblical proportions). But the ants — voiced by actors including Oscar winners Meryl Streep, Julia Roberts and Nicolas Cage — have their revenge. They shrink Lukas down to their size and show him what it's like to scurry for survival and work as a team underground.

Mr. Davis knows all about teamwork. About 100 of the 250 *Bully* workers were culled from the Dallas area; others came from as far away as Canada, Asia and South America.

But the work was done here, and that suits Mr. Davis fine.

"It's nice being at arm's length from the studio," Mr. Davis said after his presentation. "The studio is way out there. We're here. They never came out the entire time we were in production. That's good. It means they're happy and they trust us. There are no surprise visits. We're in our little creative cocoon here."

Or, perhaps, a creative anthill.

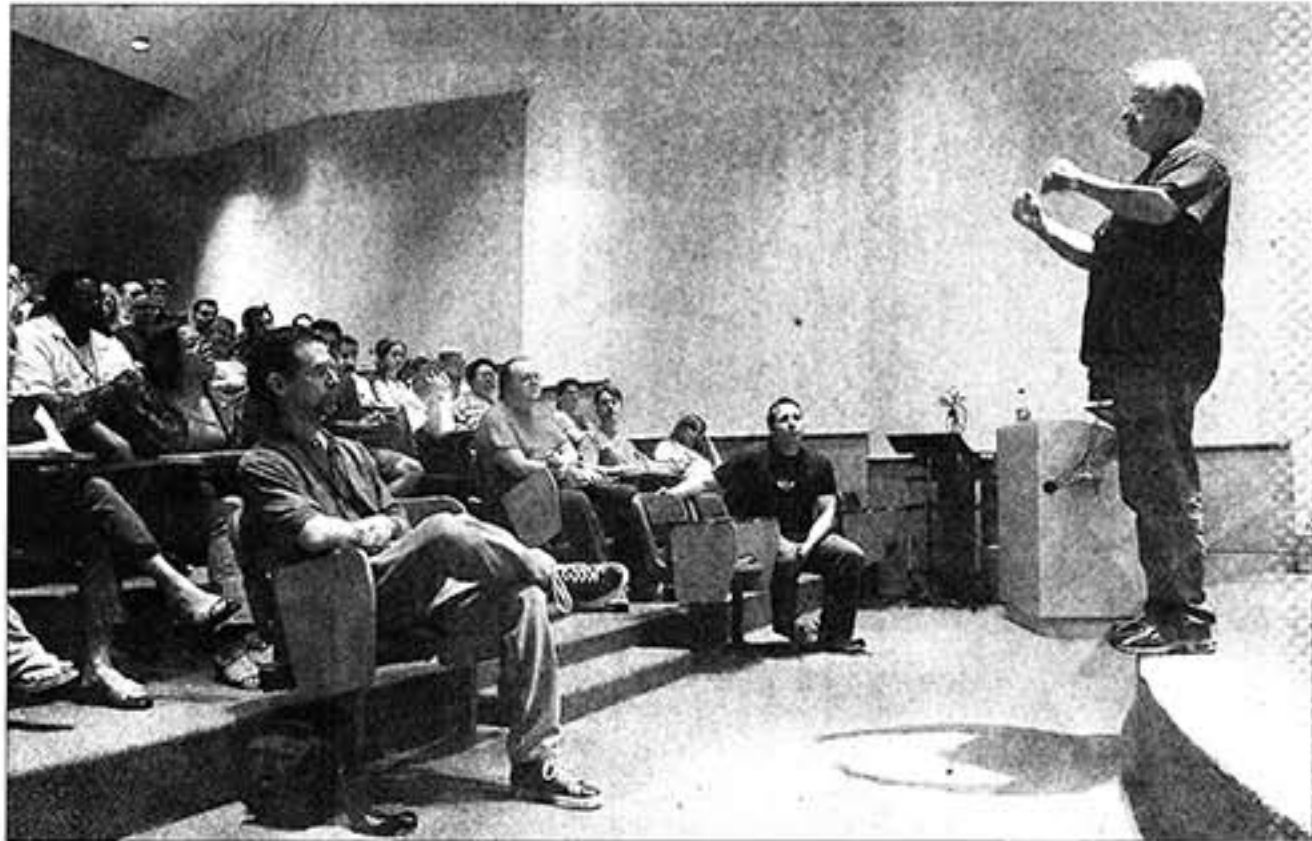
## Roots of a scene

Mr. Davis and Mr. Sidwell see Dallas' bustling animation scene as a byproduct of multiple circumstances.

The gaming scene, represented over the weekend by Microsoft Game Studios' Scott Peterson, is hugely popular in Dallas and Austin. Institutions such as the Art Institute of Dallas and CCCC's Applied Graphic Design Technology Department provide a steady stream of talent. And Dallas' live-action film industry, though hardly dormant, has struggled to keep up with out-of-state locations that offer the advantage of tax incentives for prospective movie companies.

"There's probably a lot more animation going on than live action at this point, in terms of people who are here on a consistent basis doing it," says Mr. Davis.

Mr. Sidwell saw the light while living in LA at the start of the decade. He saw an infrastructure of animation networking and opportunities, qualities he thought could be applied to Dallas' already fertile talent base. So he got together with some fellow animation professionals and started A



Ed Hooks stresses the range and depth of gesture, motion and emotion in acting for animation. He led a class Friday in Plano.

Bunch of Short Guys. (The name stems from a crew that worked on a short film that was never completed; the guys aren't all that short.)

In Los Angeles, Mr. Sidwell learned of Ed Hooks, an author who teaches classes on acting for animation. The *Short Guys* invited Mr. Hooks to Dallas to teach a master class; from there, *Industry Giants* was born.

Mr. Hooks, a jovial, pudgy man who addresses latecomers with a spirited "Hi there" or "Hey," taught this year's master class last Friday. His sessions aren't about voice acting, they're about the range and depth of gesture, motion and emotion needed to make you care about animated characters.

He brings students onstage to work on value responses ("Every character that you animate — every person in this room — has a different set of values"). He talks about the importance of empathy, status transactions (two women enact a master-slave relationship, one towering, the other cowering) and other tools of the animator's trade.

"Acting has almost nothing to do with words," he told the class as he showed the famous clip of Marlon Brando, hands at the sides of his head, begging for Stella's forgiveness in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

## A sense of community

Mr. Sidwell finishes his closing remarks and encourages attendees to gather for beers at a local drinking establishment. He is clearly excited by the weekend's events and the sense of community on display.

"There's so much good work going down, and so many talented people that float between the studios here," he says.

Mr. Davis, having spent much of the last few months in the world of ants, is also pleased. He has many friends here. He just hasn't been able to see them in a while.

Animation is fun. It also takes a

lot of hard work.

"I really wanted to come and do this to get connected with the community again," he says. "I feel like an ostrich a lot of the time, with my head in a hole working and work-

ing and working. Then I come out and say: 'What's going on? Oh, I know you. I haven't seen you in years.'"

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**Nasher Sculpture Center**

*NasherSalon:*

**THE ART OF URBAN LIVING**

**Thursday, June 15**

Doors open at 5 p.m. The Salon begins at 7:30 p.m.  
 Admission is free compliments of

*Central Market*

**Catching the Vibe**

Featuring  
**Thor Christensen, The Dallas Morning News**  
 Pop Music Critic and **Tim Delaughter,**  
*Polyphonic Spree* Founder & Lead Vocalist  
 Moderated by **Rick Holter, The Dallas Morning News**  
 Arts Editor